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The Catholic Church's politics of memory

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: The Catholic Church pursues its own politics of memory in the activities undertaken by ecclesiastical institutions as well as historians and thinkers affiliated with the Church. The political themes it addresses can be divided into those related to the Church's history (which are of a rather defensive nature) and those related to evaluations of historical events from the Church's perspective.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: Initially, uncritical apologetics was the only form of the Church's defence for its Christian vision of history. However, this changed in the middle of the 20th century, since when the Church has faced both external and internal criticism. Internally, there were calls for an objective evaluation of past events. In the second half of the 20th century, the Church attempted to confront some of the 'dark pages' of its history, in which John Paul II played a particular role.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: Three main areas of the Church's politics of memory can be identified: the defence of the thesis of the indissoluble link between European culture and Christianity; efforts to sanitise the memory of controversial events in the Church's past; and the current position taken by the Church towards its behaviour in face of 20th-century totalitarian systems, including its policy on beatification processes and the confession of faults .

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: As a response to accusations levelled at it, the Church has adopted the following course of action: first, a thorough historical

investigation; next, based on that investigation, a theological evaluation, which might lead to a confession of faults. The Church feels a special bond with previous generations of Christians and feels responsible for its actions. This is accompanied, however, by a concern to not admit to faults for which Christians are not responsible, and to not give in to excessive demands, as this could provide additional arguments to opponents of the Church and weaken the belief of the faithful in its holiness.

Keywords: Catholic Church, politics of memory, John Paul II, confession of faults, Christian Europe

Definition of the term

The Catholic Church is not a state, although its head is also the head of Vatican City State. It has its own vision of the world's history and its own vision of its own history, and – as various elements of these visions are often criticised – the Church undertakes attempts to defend them. Thus, it can be said that it pursues the politics of memory (as other churches do) which aims to influence both the consciousness of its own members and public opinion in general. According to Reinhardt Koselleck (2006), Churches belong to seven collective actors of the politics of memory that co-determine which communities or social groups will be remembered and how. These seven actors (which he calls the seven P's) include priests (who symbolise the Church), professors, pedagogues, politicians, poets, publicists, and PR specialists. Rafał Chwedoruk (2018) also recognises Churches as participants in historical debate, in which they take on a similar role to that of NGOs.

The Catholic Church has specific tools at its disposal in this area. It has authorities, a hierarchy, and institutions responsible for its foreign policy, which is, after all, frequently related to politics of memory. It issues official documents, has universities with chairs in the history of the Church, as well as scientific journals and popular periodicals. It also has intellectuals, journalists, and historians who support it (these are the other six P's, according to Koselleck's classification) and sometimes express their thoughts in a blunter and more confrontational manner than official representatives of the Church. But it also has fierce opponents of its vision of history, who specialise in exposing what was – more or less objectively – wrong or reprehensible in the Church's activities in the past.

Thus, reflections on the Church's politics of memory must consider both the institutional activities of the Church, the official statements of its representatives – on which this article focuses – and the activities of historians, journalists, and thinkers who are either Catholics or affiliated with the Church. Moreover, the areas addressed by its politics can be divided into those related to the Church's history (which are of a rather defensive nature) and those related to evaluations of historical events made from the Church's perspective.

According to the historian Marcin Kula, "institutions exist that are highly 'sensitive' to history. One of them is the Catholic Church" (2008,

p. 247). The Church is a community of memory and the living memory of Christ. Its existence begins with the words: “Do this in remembrance of Me”. Recalling Christ’s life and activity allowed disciples and subsequent generations of Christians to remember that God has fulfilled his promise and that Christians belong to the Church as a community of the faithful; after all, the Church is constituted by Christian memory (de Longchamp, 2019).

The Church asserts that its history is almost synonymous with the history of salvation. In this perspective, memory is tradition, and the history of the world in the context of salvation is a theology of the past or a theology of history. The conciliar documents *Lumen gentium* and *Gaudium et spes* present the history of the Church (seen through the prism of the Gospel) as the People of God’s journey through the ages towards salvation. The latter encyclical particularly emphasised placing the conciliar changes in the context of the historical transformations to which societies had been subjected. The profound social and cultural transformations of mid-20th-century societies necessarily affected religious life. As history accelerated, changes in traditional local societies progressed and the pattern of culture and morality changed. The Council sought to adapt the Church’s activity to the changing times, remembering that “in her most benign Lord and Master can be found the key, the focal point and the goal of man, as well as of all human history” (Second Vatican Council, 2001, 10).

However, alongside a history understood in a theological way, the Church has for centuries been immersed in an ordinary history of man, states, and nations. It is the oldest formal institution, oriented towards continuity and the lasting of its teaching, rituals, and rites; it has existed through the centuries in an ever-changing world. Averse to radical change, it has distanced itself from novelties that could disrupt the established order. At the same time, after two millennia of activity, the Church still feels responsible for specific actions from its distant past and is willing to take a formal stand or to evaluate them, such as the case of Galileo, which will be discussed later. The recognition of its continuity makes the contemporary Church feel responsible for possible transgressions committed by its institutions centuries ago. Such a position is summed up by the words of the declaration *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah*: “members of the Church, we are linked to the

sins as well as the merits of all her children" (Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, 1998).

The Church's stance towards history is particularly evident in three aspects, which will be discussed below: the vision of the history of Europe and European civilisation as inextricably linked to the history of Christianity, the Church's attitude towards the most frequent accusations against it, and the Church's attitude towards 20th-century totalitarianisms and dictatorships.

Historical analysis of the term

Through the voice of its popes, the Church has repeatedly given expression to a specific vision of the development of what is commonly called Western civilisation. For the Church, Western civilisation is a Christian civilisation, based on the Jerusalem–Athens–Rome triad, i.e., biblical religion, Greek philosophy, and Roman law. John Paul II talked about this vision during the Synod of Bishops in 1991, which was dedicated to Europe, and he also wrote about it in his *Memory and Identity* (Weigel, 2001; John Paul II, 2005). This can be summarised as the thesis that Europe became Europe because it was Christian. In the famous Euro-peistic Act of Santiago de Compostela of 1982, John Paul II said that

[t]he history of the formation of European nations goes hand in hand with their evangelization; to the point that the European borders coincide with those of the penetration of the Gospel (John Paul II, 1982, 2).

He spoke particularly forcefully about the relationship between Christianity and European culture at the UNESCO meeting in Paris on 2 June 1980:

[t]his relationship extends to the multiple realities which must be defined as concrete expressions of culture in the different periods of history and all over the world. It will certainly not be an exaggeration to state in particular that, through a multitude of facts, the whole of Europe – from the Atlantic to the Urals – bears witness, in the history of each nation as in that of the whole community, to the link between culture and Christianity (John Paul II, 1980, 9).

Importantly, emphasising the relationship between Europe and Christianity does not mean treating other cultures as less Christian. John Paul II continued:

[r]ecalling this, it is not at all my intention to belittle the heritage of the other continents, or the specific character and value of this same heritage which is derived from the other sources of religious, humanistic and ethical inspiration. What is more, I wish to pay the deepest and most sincere tribute to all the cultures of the human family as a whole, from the most ancient to the contemporary (John Paul II, 1980, 9).

Europe's relationship with Christianity was similarly summarised by John Paul II's successor. During a speech he gave at the University of Regensburg in 2006 (remembered mainly for the vehement reactions to the Pope quoting a conversation about Christianity and Islam which took place between the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Palaeologus and an educated Persian), Benedict XVI wrote of the far-reaching effects of the rapprochement between the Christian faith and Greek philosophy:

[t]his inner rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry was an event of decisive importance not only from the standpoint of the history of religions, but also from that of world history – it is an event which concerns us even today. Given this convergence, it is not surprising that Christianity, despite its origins and some significant developments in the East, finally took on its historically decisive character in Europe. We can also express this the other way around: this convergence, with the subsequent addition of the Roman heritage, created Europe and remains the foundation of what can rightly be called Europe (Benedict XVI, 2006).

In this perspective, the history of the European nations is also linked to Christianity. John Paul II repeatedly referred to the points that national identity and Christian identity share. As Gritti put it, the Pope strove

to get to the historical roots and the source of the cultural identity of each community to discover the deep convergence of this “fundamental” being with the Christian message (Gritti, 1985, p. 32).

In Ireland in 1979, referring to the country's Christian history, he said:

[f]aith and fidelity are the marks of the Church of Ireland, a Church of martyrs, a Church of witnesses, a Church of heroic faith, heroic fidelity! (Gritti, 1985, p. 31).

During his pilgrimage to France in 1980, at an airport near Paris, he asked the famous question, "France, the eldest daughter of the Church, are you faithful to the promises of your baptism?", but he could have also asked this question of most of the nations on the old continent.

Apart from emphasising Western Europe's links with Christianity, the Church also attempts to include Central and Eastern Europe within this historical Christian-European heritage. This was particularly important in the second half of the 20th century, when this part of Europe belonged to the atheistic communist Eastern Bloc. This struggle to recognise the role of Christian identity within a historical context was especially evident in Poland during the 1966 dispute over the Millennium (i.e., the political dispute between the Church's wish to celebrate the millennium of Christianity in Poland and the communist authorities' insistence on celebrating the millennium of the Polish statehood). The Church formulated an unequivocal vision: one thousand years of Poland is one thousand years of Christianity, and there would be no Polish national identity or culture as it is today if the first Piast rulers had not joined the group of nations which professed their faith in Christ. Many years later, mainly in his book *Memory and Identity*, John Paul II described the image of Poland as part of Christian Europe, i.e., Western Europe (John Paul II, 2005).

Whilst discussing the dispute over the Millennium, it is worth mentioning a specific example of the Polish Church's attempt to direct the historical consciousness of Poles. Two decades after the end of the Second World War, when Polish society was still healing from the sufferings inflicted by the Germans, and anti-German sentiments and fear of territorial revindication were being encouraged by government propaganda, the Polish bishops sent a letter to the German bishops in which they wrote "We forgive and ask for forgiveness". Not those in power, not historians, and not journalists, but the Church in Poland was the first to have the courage to publicly admit that yes, the Germans may also have suffered and been wronged during the Second World War.

At that time, the Church also emphasised its links with other countries from Central and Eastern Europe. For example, it recalled the Christian history of Czechoslovakia (one of the most atheist countries of the bloc) in the Christmas message of March 1979, on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of the canonisation of Saint John of Nepomuk. Two decades after the Polish dispute over the Millennium, in 1988, the Church highlighted

the historical role of the baptism of Kievan Rus in several of its activities, including in John Paul II's letter of March 1979 to Cardinal Josip Slipyi, in which he announced the celebrations of this anniversary and recalled its significance; in Cardinal Casaroli's visit to Moscow and his conversation with Mikhail Gorbachev at the Soviet-controlled celebrations of the 1000th anniversary of the Orthodox Church; and in John Paul II's celebration together with Ukrainian bishops of the liturgy that was held in the Byzantine-Ukrainian rite at the Ukrainian cathedral church of Santa Sophia in Rome. In a sermon delivered there, the Pope recalled the role of this baptism in the formation of the East Slavic peoples:

[f]rom the Baptism of Rus' began that slow and manifold process of cultural and social maturation which was to have such a deep influence on the formation of the Ukrainian, Byelorussian, and Russian peoples (Weigel, 2001, p. 576).

In April 1988, John Paul II published a letter to Ukrainian Greek Catholics, *Magnum Baptismi donum*, in which he reminded them that the millennium of the baptism of Prince Vladimir of 988 was also, historically speaking, the millennium of the baptism of Ukrainian Catholics. The celebrations were a reminder of the Christian roots of Russia, the history of Ukraine, and the existence of the Greek Catholic Church.

This idea was expressed in the proclamation on 31 December 1980 of Saints Cyril and Methodius – ‘Apostles of the Slavs’ – as co-patrons of Europe, alongside Saint Benedict, who represented the Western tradition. This was, as Czech Bishop Jozef Tomko recalled, “a powerful symbol of the Church's drive to give back to the peoples of east central Europe their authentic history and culture” (Weigel, 2001, p. 408). The doctrine of the ‘two lungs’ of Europe, i.e., the Western and Eastern traditions, Rome and Constantinople, had been proposed as early as after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. John Paul II spoke of these traditions at the 1991 Synod of Bishops dedicated to Europe and wrote about it in *Memory and Identity*. This concept is most extensively discussed by Grzegorz Przebinda (2001).

From the perspective of the Church's vision of history, Europe has unquestionably Christian roots. How did it happen that today many Europeans are so far removed from Christianity? In his *Memory and Identity*, John Paul II summarises the Church's view of the key stages in the history of the old continent. The Church equates Christianity with

the concept of Europeanness. The fullness of Christian Europe took place in the Middle Ages and the mature magnificent evangelisation of this period. Soon, however, the cracks appeared. First the Eastern schism, then the Reformation, and finally the Enlightenment rejection of Christianity, which is reminiscent of the rejection of Saint Paul at the Areopagus. The children of the Enlightenment were the French Revolution and (indirectly) the Bolshevik Revolution, which between them had an enormous impact on the history of Europe and the world. The Pope admitted that the European Enlightenment also bore good fruit as, alongside revolutionary atrocities, it prepared the ground for the recognition of human rights (even though the revolution itself violated these rights). According to John Paul II, the ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity were consolidated through the blood of many victims on the scaffold, and the Enlightenment ideas also led to the Communist Manifesto. Until the Second Vatican Council, the Church opposed the Enlightenment-revolutionary ideas; during the Council it undertook attempts to creatively synthesise Christianity and the Enlightenment (John Paul II, 2005).

Apologetics has been a form of defence (in Greek *apologian*) of both the truths of faith and the Christian vision of history since the dawn of the Church. In the first centuries, apologetics was primarily defensive and, in an attempt to stop the persecution of Christians, was used to prove that they could be good Roman citizens. In the following centuries, it was used against neo-Platonic views, and in the Middle Ages it was used in disputes with Jewish and Muslim worldviews and other views that were considered heretical. From the Enlightenment onwards, proponents of apologetics clashed with rationalist and atheist views. Over the centuries, the Church authorities defended the Church's actions and its views against accusations. In the middle of the 20th century, however, for both theological and social reasons, on the eve of the conciliar changes, the Church started to move away from apologetics, which was replaced in seminaries and theological faculties by a less polemically oriented fundamental theology. As Fr. Avery Dulles wrote:

[i]n a pluralist society like our own, religious faith is felt to be divisive. To avoid conflict, Christians frequently take refuge in the excuse that people should be left free to make up their own minds about what to believe (2004).

Over time, the Church faced both external and internal criticism. The latter was related to the Church's objective evaluation of past events and recognition of what was reprehensible or needed apologising for. According to some, however, this attitude went too far. In the first half of the 1990s, a well-known book written by an Italian Catholic journalist, Vittorio Messori, entitled *Czarne Karty Kościoła* [*Dark Pages of the Church*] was published, in which the author addressed typical accusations regarding mistakes that the Church had allegedly made in the past, including colonisation, the Inquisition, and anti-Semitism. In the introduction to this publication, Cardinal Giacomo Biffi, Archbishop of Bologna, stated that it is not good for Christians to feel ashamed when they hear about the Church's history. He observed that the actions of those associated with the Church cannot be analysed in isolation from the philosophical and historical context of the times in which they were set. The Church –being the only institution that has lasted almost since the dawn of modern states and nations and has been present in the life of societies for centuries – is easy prey for accusations regarding the mistakes that societies made in previous eras. Biffi opposed the irenicism that for him constituted “a strange form of Catholic masochism” (Messori, 1998, p. 10).

In the second half of the 20th century, balancing between apologetics and irenism, the Church attempted to confront some of the ‘dark pages’ of its history, to use Messori's term. John Paul II played a special role here: he referred to controversial events in history in numerous official statements, addressed the evaluations formulated by the Church's opponents in specific eras (e.g., Protestant leaders), and acknowledged that some actions of those in the Church were wrong. Luigi Accattoli enumerated 21 such issues which John Paul II addressed, including the Crusades, the religious wars, slavery, and the Church's attitude towards Native Americans (Accattoli, 1998).

The Church undertook special reflection on its history during the Jubilee year 2000. Jubilees have traditionally been a time for the confession of sins and repentance. Announcing the celebration of the two thousandth anniversary of Christianity, Pope John Paul II called upon the Church to

become more fully conscious of the sinfulness of her children recalling all those times in history when they departed from the spirit of Christ and his Gospel, and instead of offering to the world the witness of a life inspired by the values of

faith, indulged in ways of thinking and acting which were fully forms of counter-witness and scandal (Weigel, 2001, p. 745).

The Church directly addressed its faults during a prayer from the liturgy on the Day of Pardon on 12 March 2000. It admitted that, at various times, the community of the faithful had included those who, by showing disobedience to Christ, had denied the faith and the Gospel. Thus, the transgressions of members of the Church stemmed from their unfaithfulness to Revelation, and it was not the Church that was at fault but the sinful people of the Church. At the same time, the prayer did not lay the blame on 'others' who were not fully faithful but directly requested: "You, who remain ever faithful, even when we are unfaithful, forgive our sins and grant that we may bear true witness to you before all men and women" (John Paul II, 2000). In the Universal Prayer, which was read out by several hierarchs, forgiveness was asked – directly or indirectly – for such events in the history of the Church as forced conversions, the Crusades, the Inquisition, anti-Semitism, and discrimination against women.

John Paul II referred to this liturgy in his apostolic letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, issued at the end of the Great Jubilee. In it, he reiterated that "Christianity is a religion rooted in history! It was in the soil of history that God chose to establish a covenant with Israel and so prepare the birth of the Son from the womb of Mary 'in the fullness of time' (Gal 4:4). Understood in his divine and human mystery, Christ is the foundation and centre of history, he is its meaning and ultimate goal". The Jubilee was strongly marked by the plea for forgiveness concerning the whole Church, "which has decided to recall the infidelities of so many of her children in the course of history, infidelities which have cast a shadow over her countenance as the Bride of Christ". John Paul II recalled that the Church "embracing sinners in her bosom, is at once holy and always in need of being purified" and that as part of the Jubilee, scholarly conferences were organised to identify certain events from the past in which "the Gospel spirit did not always shine forth" (John Paul II, 2001, 5, 6).

The case of Galileo Galilei, an Italian scientist from the turn of the 17th century, is a good example of one such controversy. He was forced by the Inquisition to retract his heliocentric views and sentenced to three years in prison. On 31 July 1982, Pope John Paul II established

a special commission, which 10 years later published a report acknowledging the error of Galileo's judges, who were "incapable of dissociating faith from and old-age cosmology" (Weigel, 2001, p. 630). The Inquisition is another recurring theme in the Church's history. In October 1998, a three-day international conference devoted to the subject was held at the Vatican. John Paul II said at its conclusion:

That is why the first step is to question historians, who are not asked to make an ethical judgement, which would exceed their sphere of competence, but to help in the most precise reconstruction possible of the events, customs and mentality of the time, in the light of the era's historical context (John Paul II, 1998, 4).

New accusations against the Church's activities of the past are constantly emerging in the public space, including recent allegations that refer to unethical attempts to uproot Native American and Australian children from their native environments and to forcibly 'civilise' them. Benedict XVI apologised to Australian Aborigines for the Church's involvement, and Francis apologised to the Inuit and Métis in Canada. Local Churches have also responded to allegations, e.g., the Ordinary of the Diocese of Cayenne in French Guiana apologised on behalf of his Church for its complicity in slavery and colonial exploitation. Both Benedict XVI and the Irish Church have apologised for child abuse in Catholic orphanages, and John Paul II, Pope Francis, and the bishops of Rwanda apologised for the Church's inappropriate behaviour during the massacres of Tutsis by Hutus.

Discussion of the term

The Church's politics of memory has also had to respond to the issue of 20th-century dictatorships (Chwedoruk, 2018). This response covers two areas: the Church's position on the genesis and collapse of these dictatorships, and the behaviour of the Church and its representatives towards and within the states in which totalitarian ideology had taken hold.

The Church argues that the departure from Christian roots and the forgetting of God is to blame for the birth of the two worst totalitarianisms of the last century: the Nazis and the communists. Through the rejection

of Christ and a mistaken notion of freedom, Europe, the cradle of civilisation and evangelisation, became the leaven of anti-evangelisation and the cradle of dictatorships. "Freedom is properly so called to the extent that it implements the truth regarding the good", John Paul II wrote in *Memory and Identity*. When freedom ceases to be fused with the truth, it has incalculable moral consequences:

the abuse of freedom provokes a reaction which takes the form of one totalitarian system or another. This is another form of the corruption of freedom, the consequences of which we have experienced in the twentieth century and beyond (John Paul II, 2005, p. 42).

Earlier, in a similar way, this was formulated in the encyclical *Centesimus annus*, in which he emphasised that, contrary to popular opinion, agnosticism and scepticism are not at all the worldviews best suited to democratic societies: "[a]s history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism" (John Paul II, 2000, 46).

At the same time, the Church argues that Providence and the institutional Church played a special role in the collapse of these totalitarianisms, especially in the liberation of Central and Eastern Europe from the yoke of communism and Soviet domination. On 5 June 1991, at the First Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops, Pope John Paul II said that the transformations in the Eastern Bloc revealed the presence of 'Divine *kairos*'; this was a moment when the Divine power working within history was almost tangible. According to the Pope, these transformations can be understood only through a conception of history that leaves room for God and Divine providence and in which religion and the Church are among the most effective factors of man's liberation from a system of total dependence (Weigel, 2000, pp. 817, 818). This thesis was later most fully expressed by George Weigel in his book *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism* (2003), in which he argued that it was not the policies of Reagan or Gorbachev, nor the Helsinki Final Act, nor the economic crisis, but the revolution of the spirit based on Christianity that made the autumn of nations in 1989 possible.

However, this positive vision is accompanied by accusations that the Church's opposition to fascist or Nazi dictatorships, especially the anti-Jewish policies of the Third Reich, was not strong enough. Rolf

Hochhuth's play *The Deputy* is a good example here: it put forward the thesis that Pope Pius XII, and with him the entire Church, remained silent on the Holocaust of the Jews. The historiography of the dispute regarding this Pope is most extensively presented in the book *Pius XII. Papież w epoce totalitaryzmów. Historiografia i polityka* [*Pius XII. The Pope in the Age of Totalitarianisms. Historiography and Politics*], edited by Marek Kornat (2010).

The 1998 declaration *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah* outlines the attitude of the contemporary Church to the Holocaust, which can be summarised in several points. First, it acknowledged the tragedy of the Shoah as a unique crime in the history of nations and rightly placed the responsibility for it on Nazi ideology, which was also an evidently anti-Christian ideology. Second, it recalled the role of those Christians who risked their lives to save Jews. Third, it posed the question of whether previous anti-Jewish prejudices – although quite different from Nazi anti-Semitism – had not contributed to Christians' lack of sensitivity to the plight of the Jews during the Second World War. The document was criticised by the Jewish side, which expected a more explicit acknowledgment of the Church's co-responsibility for antisemitism and the Holocaust, but it clearly defined the Church's position: we acknowledge the crime, we know who was responsible, and we ourselves ask whether we contributed to it in any way and whether we reacted too weakly. It is worth mentioning here that the German Bishops' Conference had admitted its co-responsibility for the Holocaust in 1995. Two years later, the French bishops asked for forgiveness for not defending the Jews during the Second World War, and President Jacques Chirac admitted in 1995 that the Vichy State and the French services had actively participated in the deportations of Jews to the death camps. However, while such an apology may have been justified in the case of the particularist German and French Churches, the case is different for the universal Church. The beatification of two German priests, Bernhard Lichtenberg and Karl Leisner, who were murdered by the Nazis for anti-regime activities, can be seen as the Church's response to the accusations against the German Church (Weigel, 2001). Moreover, the declaration *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah* included a defence of Pius XII's position in a footnote, which also provoked some criticism.

Due to the recurring controversy over this issue, in December 2007 Benedict XVI halted Pius XII's beatification process (which had begun during the pontificate of Paul VI), although two years later he issued a decree on the heroicity of his virtues. Similarly, the canonisation process of the Croatian priest, Metropolitan Archbishop Aloysius Stepinac of Zagreb, previously beatified by Pope John Paul II, was halted by Pope Francis in 2016. Although Stepinac supported the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia (a puppet state of Nazi Germany), he also protested against the anti-Jewish policies of the *Ustaše* leader Ante Pavelić and in 1946 was sentenced to over a dozen years in prison by Josip Broz Tito's regime. When beatifying Stepinac, Pope John Paul II stated that Stepinac's life had synthesised the tragedy of Europe marked by three plagues: fascism, Nazism, and communism (Kornat, 2010). These decisions, like the aforementioned beatifications of Bernhard Lichtenberg and Karl Leisner, demonstrate that beatification and canonisation processes can also be a form of implementation of the politics of memory by the Church. Undoubtedly, these are processes of a religious nature which are directly linked to the religious concept of the communion of saints and the real cult of specific deceased persons who bore witness to the faith and often to martyrdom during their lifetime. However, the very choice of Servants of God, the place and time of their beatification or canonisation, and the message communicated at that time could directly relate to history. This is particularly relevant in the case of controversial events of modern or recent history. The beatifications of Father Maximilian Kolbe and Edith Stein symbolise the ordeal of many priests or nuns in concentration camps and are examples from the period of the Second World War and the extermination of the Jews, in which the canonisation of Edith Stein was particularly significant. She died because she was both Jewish and Catholic, thus her canonisation was a remembrance of both the Holocaust and the sufferings of the Church, although some Jewish circles saw it as an attempt to obscure the Church's alleged responsibility for anti-Semitism (Weigel, 2001, pp. 542). The recently announced beatification of the Ulma family will provide an opportunity to remind the world of those Poles who saved Jews during the war and the sacrifices they made.

Another good example here is the beatification and canonisation processes of victims of the Spanish Civil War. This conflict, which was

seen as a prologue to the Second World War, is sometimes presented as being a direct confrontation between two totalitarian ideas: fascist and communist. However, the fighting sides were not politically homogeneous. The insurgents included the fascist 'Falange', monarchists, traditionalists, some moderate republicans, and the majority of Christians, while the government camp included Republicans, anarchists, socialists, and communists. Franco's troops were aided by Italy and Germany, and the government camp was supported by the Soviet Union, the Comintern, and many volunteers from abroad with leftist, not necessarily communist, convictions. Today, public opinion, especially in the West, holds a positive image of the government side, while General Francisco Franco's camp is treated as fundamentally fascist; this assessment is confirmed by the later years of the Francoist dictatorship in Spain. The victims of the communists are hardly ever mentioned; if so, it is usually in the context of internal quarrels within the government camp. These are mostly anarchists who were repressed by the communists and whose legend is defended in the works of famous authors such as Ernest Hemingway and George Orwell.

However, most victims on the Republican side were Catholics, including the clergy, priests, monks, and nuns, who were murdered for their faith and thus hold the palm of martyrdom. Some interpreted the Church's commemoration of these victims as revealing the repressive nature of the government camp in contrast to the Francoist side, which did not persecute the Church (the exception being a few Basque priests executed for collaborating with the government side). As Bishop Justo Fernandez Alonso, director of the Spanish Institute of Ecclesiastical Studies, wrote:

Conciliatory motives caused a delay in the beatification processes that had already begun; it was only in the early 1980s that they were given the green light again (Messori, 1998, p. 62).

In 1963, Pope Paul VI halted the beatification and canonisation processes for the victims of the Spanish Civil War to avoid strengthening Franco's regime and taking sides in the dispute over the assessment of this conflict (Weigel, 2000, p. 750), but John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis had no such qualms. First, in 1987, John Paul II beatified three Carmelite nuns from Guadalajara; in 1989, 26 priests and seminarians

of the Passionist order, who were murdered in 1936; in 1992, 122 martyrs from the Claretian and Brothers of Saint John of God orders; and in 2001, in the first beatification of the 21st century, 233 Spanish monks and nuns from various religious congregations. This path was continued by Benedict XVI, who, in the first beatification of this pontificate in 2005, beatified seven diocesan priests from Urgell and one nun. Two years later, he beatified nearly five hundred victims of the Red Terror in Spain – murdered 'out of hatred of the faith'. 522 martyrs for the faith were beatified in 2013 in Tarragona, Spain, and although Pope Francis was not personally present at the ceremony, which was presided over by Cardinal Angelo Amato, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, his papal address was delivered there. The line initiated by John Paul II is thus being consistently continued. All the ceremonies – those in Saint Peter's Square at the Vatican and in Spain, attended by crowds of thousands of the faithful who held Spanish flags and images of the martyrs – were not only religious festivities but also a voice in the public debate on the war and its victims. Through these beatification processes, the Church has exposed the enormity of the crimes of the government camp, which stands in stark contrast to the mainstream image of the conflict and provokes criticism from politicians and some in the media.

The Church's politics of memory pursued through beatification and canonization processes is also applied to other disputed historical events.

Apart from beatifying numerous victims of the Spanish Civil War, John Paul II also beatified the martyrs of two other fratricidal conflicts formerly considered too controversial to be touched upon: the French Revolution and the Mexican 'Cristero' uprising of the 1920s (Weigel, 2000, p. 750).

The first martyrs of the French Revolution, the Carmelite Sisters, were beatified by Pope Pius X in 1906. Beatifications of the victims of the Revolution also took place after the Second World War, when Pius XII beatified 13 martyrs from Laval in 1955. However, this was followed by a long break which ended in 1984 when John Paul II beatified 99 martyrs from Angers. In 1995, he beatified 64 victims of La Rochelle – priests and monks who had refused to take the oath of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and died because of the inhumane conditions in which

they were imprisoned on ships docked in French ports. In the same ceremony in Saint Peter's Square at the Vatican, the Pope beatified 45 Spanish martyrs, though which he symbolically equated the persecutions of the French Revolution and the Spanish Civil War. Beatifications of martyrs from the period of religious persecution in Mexico took place during the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. In 1988, John Paul II beatified Jesuit Father Miguel Pro, who was shot dead in 1927, and in 1992 – almost exactly two months after the historic establishment of full diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Mexico – 25 clerics, known as the Mexican martyrs, who were subsequently canonised eight years later. Another 13 victims from Mexico were beatified by Benedict XVI in 2005.

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

The Catholic Church pursues its own, continuously evolving, the politics of memory in which it defends its claim that Providence has participated in the history of the world and of the existence of an indissoluble link between European culture and Christianity. The Church's role in past events which today are condemned, such as the Crusades, the Inquisition, and their behaviour during the Second World War, remain a particularly controversial issue. As a result, there has been a process of purification of memory, especially since the pontificate of John Paul II, the vital elements of which are the Church's admission of its mistakes and apologies to the victims. Its course of action is set out in the document issued by the International Theological Commission entitled *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past*: first a sound historical investigation, which takes into account the context of the events; next, on the basis of this investigation, a theological evaluation which can provide grounds for a possible confession of faults. The Church, as the Mystical Body, feels a special bond with earlier generations of Christians and feels responsible for their deeds. However, this is accompanied by concern not to admit to guilt for deeds that it did not commit and not to give in to excessive demands, as this could provide additional arguments to the Church's opponents and weaken the

conviction of believers in the holiness of the Church. Here, the Church's teaching is unchanging: mistakes may be made – and are made – by people in the Church, but the Church itself is holy.

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