MASTERS IN THEIR OWN HOME OR DEFENDERS OF THE HUMAN PERSON?
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MASTERS IN THEIR OWN HOME OR DEFENDERS OF THE HUMAN PERSON? WOJCEICH KORFANTY, ANTI-SEMITISM, AND POLISH CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY’S ILLIBERAL RIGHTS-TALK*

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Prior to World War II, the founder and key theorist of Poland’s Christian Democratic movement—the Silesian political revolutionary Wojciech Korfanty—developed a sophisticated “Catholic rights-talk” in conversation with trends in Western European Catholic thought. In the wake of the Holocaust, however, both in ephemeral political opposition on Polish soil and in subsequent exile, Poland’s Christian Democrats abandoned their interwar rights discourse. This essay explores that shift, locating its source in interwar Polish Catholic anti-Semitism. Given the Holocaust’s perverse fulfillment of Polish Christian Democracy’s crucial 1930s advocacy of restricting the political and economic life of Poland to rights-endowed Christians—necessitating the removal of Jewish “non-persons”—the Poles’ transnational postwar advocacy vacillated between Cold War cooperation with American-aligned governments and a desire to participate in the governance of a Poland that, even if Communist, had finally become a “nationally homogeneous state.”

Given the historiographical revolution of the last ten or so years in the study of twentieth-century European Catholicism, it can be difficult to balance the grand narrative of transnational Catholic modernization and Cold War engagement with crucial regional and national singularities. The now standard snapshot of

* The author thanks Duncan Kelly, Brian Porter-Szücs, and the three journal reviewers for their feedback on earlier versions of this essay, as well as participants in the February 2013 New Histories of Transnational Christianity workshop at Harvard University.

1 Key works include Wolfram Kaiser, Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union (Cambridge, 2007); Maria Mitchell, The Origins of Christian Democracy: Politics...
the liberalizing quasi-corporatism of Marshall Plan-funded, post-World War II European integration by Christian Democratic parties is no longer sufficient. There are fundamental questions to be posed in the broader European and global contexts about the Catholic stance at mid-century on an entire canon of juridical and political concepts ranging from sovereignty, to democracy, to rights (of the individual and of the person).

The last of these elements is particularly problematic. Samuel Moyn has provided a breakthrough account of the emergence of a Catholic “new rights-talk” in the late 1930s and early 1940s, pegging it to the increasingly pro-democratic writings of French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, while also acknowledging that the premise of this Catholic rights-talk was almost always hostile to liberalism.² There is, nonetheless, implicit in this story a liberalizing trajectory: looking back from the early twenty-first century, we recognize that Catholic rights-talk ultimately became a cornerstone of the discursive frames of Popes John XXIII, Paul VI, and John Paul II, not to mention the declarations and constitutions of the Second Vatican Council, from Gaudium et Spes to Nostra Aetate.³ However inimical the origins of Catholic rights-talk from the standpoint of our dominant conceptual framework of Enlightenment-rooted “rights of man and citizen,” the tendency remains to find a convergence between that framework and the Thomist-inspired Catholic project of protecting the dignity and rights of “human personhood.”⁴

That liberalizing trajectory, however, applies only to certain strains within the early Catholic rights-talk. John Connelly has documented the foundational role of anti-Judaism in Catholic salvation doctrine, as well as the anti-Semitism and racism that traditional Catholic anti-Judaism bred in interwar German-language Central Europe.⁵ Paul Hanebrink has incisively captured the exclusionary paradigm of “rights of the (Christian) man” that framed 1930s and World

² Moyn, “Personalism,” esp. 95.
⁴ By “human personhood” this article intends also that term’s semantic iterations, especially “human person” and “human personality.”
War II-era Hungarian Catholic rights-talk despite its embrace of personalism. This essay will examine another Central/Eastern European case that further complicates our understanding of the Catholic rights-talk trajectory: that of Poland.

To an even greater extent than in former Dual Monarchy Hungary, memory of Central and Eastern Europe’s all-too-recent imperial mosaic of multiculturalism and statelessness plagued the political culture of the Polish state resurrected in 1918 out of three 123-year-old partitions. Unlike Hungary, Poland soon found itself sharing its entire eastern border with Europe’s rising atheist power, the Soviet Union. When its papal nuncio from the years of the Polish–Bolshevik War of 1919–20, Achille Cardinal Ratti, was elevated to the papacy after his return to Rome, he gave his full support not to Poland’s budding Christian Democratic movement, rooted in the regions of Pomerania and Silesia, but instead to the political movement of non-Communist socialists rallying around Poland’s war hero, Marshal Józef Piłsudski.

An anti-Russian, agnostic ex-revolutionary, Piłsudski sought to establish a multiconfessional, multicultural Polish state in which Jews, Ukrainians, and Germans would share in civic life with their Catholic counterparts. It was Piłsudski’s anti-Bolshevism that proved decisive in obtaining Pius XI’s long-term support for his political camp, consisting first of socialists, then—following his May 1926 coup d’état—the so-called Sanacja (meaning “cure” in Polish), to which he entrusted his dictatorial powers.

In parallel with Sanacja flourished also National Democracy, born in the Russian partition of Poland in the 1880s and grown by its most influential theorist, Roman Dmowski, into a mass movement of antiliberal, anti-Semitic, anti-German nationalists. Having achieved a significant grassroots presence in all three partitions prior to World War I, National Democracy remained the choice of parish priests and bishops alike in villages and towns across independent Poland. Dmowski participated in the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, and alongside Piłsudski he gained an almost mythical status in the Polish political imaginary that has long outlasted his death in 1939.

Between the Holy See’s support for Piłsudski and the long-standing National Democratic sympathies of Polish clergy, Christian Democracy found itself

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7 On the partitions see Piotr S. Wandycz, *The Lands of Partitioned Poland, 1795–1918* (Seattle, 1974).
marginalized from its inception. Shared ideas and political constituencies—in the German partition, its future leaders, especially Wojciech Korfanty, had been considered leading National Democrats—made it difficult for Christian Democracy to take on Dmowski’s masses. At the same time, particularly after Piłsudski’s coup, the Sanacja’s entrenchment in power and starkly different notions of Polish nationhood made it an easy target for Christian Democratic ire. Indeed, the otherwise unlikely alliance between Piłsudski and the Holy See ultimately drove interwar Polish Christian Democracy toward a rights-talk predicated on contradictory aims: opposing everything for which Piłsudski stood while anchoring its ideology in the encyclicals of its opponent’s patron (the pope).

In the 1920s and 1930s, Polish Christian Democracy developed as a coherent political project embedded in, yet fundamentally distinct from, the latticework of faith practices and social networks that defined “Polish Catholicism.” Christian Democrats came into progressively deeper contact with French and German Catholic thinkers like Jacques Maritain, Max Scheler, and Dietrich von Hildebrand. The first generation of Polish Christian Democrats joined in their transnational conversations, paradoxically according equal priority to exclusionary nationalism and the social question. Wojciech Korfanty, the movement’s founder, became its chief ideologue.

Given his role in shaping twentieth-century Central and Eastern Europe, it is remarkable how little attention Wojciech Korfanty has received from historians. Born in Upper Silesia, Korfanty debuted as a deputy in the German imperial Reichstag in 1903 as a representative of National Democracy. A gifted orator with a populist streak, Korfanty was a serious player in both imperial and Silesian politics.

10 On Korfanty’s leadership of National Democracy in the German partition see Bjork, German nor Pole, 77–89.
13 On 4 April 1908, from the Reichstag rostrum, Korfanty railed against German liberals, “You, the democrats of today’s Germany, seem to me to be no more than democrats in slippers, bathrobes, and nightcaps.” Reprinted in Wojciech Korfanty, Wojciech Korfanty: Przemówienia z lat 1904–1918 (Katowice, 2012), 31–4, at 33. For the relevant context, see Bjork, German nor Pole, 133–7. All translations from the Polish and the French in this article are the author’s.
The end of World War I gave him the opportunity to shine. With the fate of Upper Silesia still indeterminate by the time of the Treaty of Versailles, Korfanty was Poland’s commissioner for the League of Nations-sponsored 1921 plebiscite on whether Upper Silesia should remain German or become Polish. Following an unfavorable vote for Poles, Korfanty declared himself “dictator” of a Silesian uprising—the third since 1919—which gave Poland the leverage to negotiate the region’s partitioning with Germany. James Bjork is right to describe Korfanty as a “larger-than-life personality.” The New York Times correspondent who interviewed him in the wake of the failed plebiscite noted, “His only companion in the room where I interviewed him was a huge wolfhound which bared its fangs as I entered and was only quieted when Korfanty touched him with a leather whip which he keeps on his desk for the purpose.”

This essay makes two tightly linked arguments. The first is that Wojciech Korfanty—who, following the successful uprising, entered mainstream national politics and created the Chrześcijańska Demokracja (Christian Democracy) party—developed on that party’s behalf a sophisticated, self-styled social-Catholic discourse of the rights of the human person that was essentially exclusionary. In other words, rather than a universalizing discourse intended to apply to all of humanity, Korfanty restricted the category of human persons to Christians, specifically excluding Jews. As historians such as John Connelly and Paul Hanebrink have demonstrated in other national contexts, this was entirely consistent with mainstream Catholic theology of the time, which even admitted disputes as to whether baptism sufficed to endow Jews with personhood. The predication of social justice on national “homogenization” made for a stark dissonance at the heart of the Christian Democratic program outlined by Korfanty in the pages of his journal Polonia. This dissonance reflected singularly Polish circumstances rooted in the unique role of Silesia in Korfanty’s thought and politics.

Second, this dissonance helps to explain the nature of the dramatic shift in Polish Christian Democracy’s political agenda during and after World War II. Although the material realities of war, occupation, and the postwar establishment of the Iron Curtain were the principal conditions shaping the Christian Democratic political imaginary of the 1940s and 1950s, the replacement

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15 Bjork, German nor Pole, 214–66.
16 Bjork, German nor Pole, 219.
18 Connelly, From Enemy to Brother, 1–35.
19 Orzechowski, Wojciech Korfanty, 359.
of Jews and Sanacja with the Soviet Union revolutionized Polish Christian Democratic discourse—both in Communist Poland and in exile. Just as the Holocaust and Poland’s postwar pogroms had essentially accomplished the Christian Democrats’ prewar goal of becoming economic “masters in their own home,” Soviet-backed political forces took this away from Polish landholders.

In the wake of World War II, following the German occupation, the Holocaust, and the postwar adjustments of Poland’s borders, a newly homogenized Polish population no longer lent itself to rights-talk, even in the face of an ascendant new occupying power, the Soviet Union. The word “rights” disappeared almost entirely from the writings of all but one of the postwar Christian Democratic ideologues, and even the onset of Stalinism and the forcing of these ideologues into either prison or exile did not reanimate debates about “rights.” Rights-talk collapsed as the language of Catholic dissidence and antiauthoritarianism until other Polish milieux created their own in the 1960s and 1970s. One cannot be satisfied here with the inference that the situation behind the Iron Curtain in the 1950s was just as Samuel Moyn has described for Western Europe at the time.20 The dramatic violence of the occupation of Poland in World War II and the singular role of Silesia in the Polish political imaginary made a fundamental difference.

CATHOLIC RIGHTS–TALK IN THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC

The political system of interwar Poland was, simply put, an anarchic mess. Between 1918 and 1923, Poland had ten prime ministers and fourteen governments. The Constituent Sejm (parliament) served until the first regular elections were held in 1922—once the borders of the Second Polish Republic had been finalized at long last. Until then, Józef Piłsudski occupied the ill-defined, unelected executive position of naczelnik państwa (chief of state), and the cult of personality with which some political parties surrounded him encouraged those who opposed him to voice their anger in the streets, rather than in apparently futile elections.21 Street violence—which had long dominated a mass politics heavily constrained by Poland’s partitioning empires—left no doubt that the country was at a deadlock between the respective camps of its two most celebrated founding fathers: Piłsudski and Dmowski.

Throughout the 1920s, Korfanty kept one foot in national politics and one in Silesian affairs. The latter was his principal focus, a consequence of having

midwifed its incorporation into the Second Polish Republic. A leading figure in the Sejm from 1919 onward, Korfanty quickly came into conflict with Piłsudski. First floated in June 1922, Korfanty’s candidacy for prime minister was ultimately approved one month later, with the Silesian politician’s name submitted to Piłsudski as parliament’s official appointee. Carrying the support of Christian Democracy and National Democracy, Korfanty had won the Sejm vote by 219 to 206, with all of Piłsudski’s supporters against him. The marshal sent the speaker of the Sejm a brief note: “Without going into the merits of the matter or the person concerned, or the possible outcome of efforts by Mr Wojciech Korfanty, designated by the Main Commission for the office of prime minister, I cannot participate in this effort.”

To avoid paralyzing government, Korfanty withdrew his candidacy, and the highest office that he ever attained in interwar Poland was that of deputy prime minister, for less than two months in 1923 under Peasant Party leader Wincenty Witos. Korfanty’s long-time friend Kajetan Morawski—the Second Polish Republic’s last ambassador to France—suggested, “No compromise was possible between the plans of the Lithuanian loner from the Belvedere Palace and the ideas of the leader of the Silesian masses.”

Piłsudski’s May 1926 coup against another Witos government found Korfanty in Warsaw, where he counseled his former chief—unsuccessfully—on how to fight back against Piłsudski. Given the marshal’s subsequent subordination of parliament to successive governments under his influence, Korfanty unsurprisingly became one of the new Sanacja camp’s principal opponents and targets. Within months of the coup, the central government had nominated as the new governor of Silesia Michał Grażyński, a sworn opponent of Korfanty’s from the days of the uprisings. At that point, Korfanty had an opportunity to reconcile with Sanacja, perhaps in the form of a power-sharing arrangement with Grażyński. As Edward Długajczyk has argued, however, “that he did not do this was not a matter of principle, for he was nothing if not a pragmatist, but rather for personal reasons. Namely, he saw Silesia as his own personal domain.” For reasons of both entrenched personal animus and direct pressure from Warsaw, Grażyński came down hard on Korfanty, his businesses, and his political party. Faced with accusations of being an agent of “foreign capital,” Korfanty consented in 1927 to face impeachment hearings in the Polish parliament; though acquitted, he faced the shame of censure for conduct unbecoming an MP.

22 Quoted in Lewandowski, Wojciech Korfanty, 124.
23 Quoted in ibid., 127.
25 Ibid., 149.
In its original incarnation, Christian Democracy in Poland had been little more than a regional party of Silesian landholders and industrialists. However, as the Sanacja and its archfoe, Roman Dmowski’s National Democracy, developed a stranglehold on interwar Polish political culture, Chrześcijańska Demokracja and its leader Korfanty fleshed out their ideal vision of democracy—in general, and for Poland specifically. In 1924, Wojciech Korfanty acquired two publishing houses. One produced the major Warsaw-based daily Rzeczpospolita (Republic), which Korfanty also bought. Out of the other, he built the Katowice-based daily Polonia, which overnight became one of the highest-circulating publications in Poland, beginning with a print run of 40,000 (75,000 for special editions) and the low per-issue price of only ten groszy.\(^{26}\)

From its debut on 24 October 1924 until Korfanty’s death in August 1939, Polonia served myriad interests, at once representing Christian Democracy to Silesia, Silesia to the whole of Poland, and Korfanty’s philosophical and political commitments to its entire readership. Indeed, the paper served, among other things, as Korfanty’s personal soapbox—in particular for his political philosophy and his railings against Piłsudski and Sanacja. In return, Polonia became a favorite target of Governor Grażyński’s for search-and-seizure connected to tax-fraud investigations, and Korfanty and his staff fielded threats to their physical well-being on a daily basis. Just in the year leading up to Korfanty’s November 1927 impeachment hearings, a bomb went off outside the Polonia offices, and Polonia’s editor-in-chief, Władysław Zabawski, was beaten half to death.

A few words are in order about how Korfanty and Polonia fit into the broader intellectual landscape of interwar Poland. For the many exhaustive studies of interwar Polish diplomatic and political history, the Polish intellectual history of those years remains underdetermined in the historiography of modern Europe. Marci Shore has documented both the world of German-influenced Polish phenomenology and Warsaw’s literary avant-garde—Władysław Broniewski, Julian Tuwim, Aleksander Wat—caught between Communism and Zionism, wrestling with Jewish identity and assimilation in interwar Poland, some of them later going on to build and serve the postwar Communist regime.\(^{27}\) Agnieszka Marczyk has placed many of these latter figures in a longer genealogy of Polish philosophy beginning in the late nineteenth century.\(^{28}\) Some interdisciplinary work exists in Polish on the extremely popular integral nationalism of the 1920s.

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\(^{26}\) Lewandowski, Wojciech Korfanty, 146.

\(^{27}\) Marci Shore, Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation’s Life and Death in Marxism, 1918–1968 (New Haven, 2006).

and 1930s—whether the political writings of Roman Dmowski or the anti-Semitic historiosophy of the influential scholar Feliks Koneczny. This author has written elsewhere of the vibrant Catholic intellectual life of the Second Polish Republic, including a Catholic university founded at Lublin in 1918, linked with other universities across Poland in a network of Catholic students and alumni called Odrodzenie (Renaissance).

Few of those milieux, however, had any direct influence on interwar Upper Silesia, where the process of Polish nation and state building had only just gotten under way by the mid-1920s. As one of the region’s political and industrial leaders (in addition to his publishing ventures, Korfanty had a gift for investing, as well as extensive contacts in France and Germany to diversify those investments), the Christian Democrat also took it upon himself to turn Polonia into a vehicle of nation building guided by Catholic social teaching, which became ever more important to him as Piłsudski appointees played a larger and larger role in the state-building process. As Korfanty’s biographer Marian Orzechowski has argued, “An expert in the main intellectual currents and streams of his era—modern integral nationalism, followed by social Catholicism and personalism—he was able, with great finesse and sensitivity to on-the-ground Silesian realities, to translate them into terms intelligible to the average Silesian.”

In fifteen years’ worth of essays published in Polonia, Korfanty developed a two-pronged vision of democracy. On the one hand, democracy in Poland was to imply a rejection of the multi-century legacy of imperial subjecthood, erasing the memory of the partitions of Poland. On the other, democracy proscribed a dictatorial model of “statolatry” that Korfanty identified especially with Piłsudski and—by way of international comparison—with the Italian Fascist leader Benito Mussolini. Korfanty made a point of opposing almost everything for which Piłsudski claimed to stand. As a result, Korfanty became not only an advocate of democracy and the rule of law, but also—in line with his earlier identity as a National Democrat—an opponent of Piłsudski’s multiethnic conception of Poland, with particular animus toward Germans, Jews, and Ukrainians.

The “Christian” element in Korfanty’s Christian Democracy remained very much in flux. The fundamental problem for Korfanty was one of tactical alliance,

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32 Orzechowski, Wojciech Korfanty, 431.
33 At the same time, this animus did not prevent him from striking deals with the parliamentary representatives of these minorities. Lewandowski, Wojciech Korfanty, 122–7.
not ideological inspiration. It was Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* that had first inspired him to go into German politics in the early 1900s, and Pius XI’s *Quadragesimo Anno* earned almost equal praise in Korfanty’s writings. That said, the interwar Pope was a deeply problematic figure for Polish Christian Democracy because—as Neal Pease has demonstrated—Piłsudski’s leadership during the Polish–Bolshevik War had so impressed Pius XI, who passed the entirety of the August 1920 siege of Warsaw inside the city, that he thereafter maintained a deep emotional attachment to the Polish leader. Their shared anti-Bolshevism thus rendered irrelevant Piłsudski’s otherwise near-total incompatibility with political Catholicism. However often Piłsudski paraded mistresses in public, however rarely he appeared at church, however repressive his domestic politics against prominent Polish lay Catholics—Pius XI remained in the marshal’s corner.34

Given Korfanty’s paradoxical position of being in Catholic opposition to the Holy See’s political ally in Poland, it is unsurprising that, while attentive and creative in his interaction with the most cutting-edge Catholic political philosophy of his day, he was hardly in lockstep with the Pius XI-driven rights-talk that Samuel Moyn has analyzed in his writings. While the social question and national sovereignty remained central in Korfanty’s understanding of Christianity’s relevance to democracy, the May 1926 coup bred not only political conflicts and physical violence, but also principled clarifications of Korfanty’s political philosophy. Confronting some of the same questions as Carl Schmitt as to the source of legitimate authority in the modern state and the religious roots of political sovereignty, Korfanty drew the opposite conclusions as Schmitt, emphasizing not decisionism but an organic communitarianism: a “Catholic conception of the essence of the state” as “a collection of people bound together by fate and tied together with knots that cannot be loosened.”35

In September 1930, the Sanacja-appointed president, Ignacy Mościcki, dissolved both parliament and regional assemblies throughout Poland. Four years into Sanacja rule, anti-Piłsudski sentiment had grown among both the center and the left—his traditional base—which led to the decision to round up and imprison those leaders in preparations for show trials accusing them of conspiracy to launch their own coup. Korfanty, though not a politician of the left, was arrested on the day of the Silesian assembly’s dissolution, which suspended his parliamentary immunity. *Polonia* made a great deal of the dissonance between the accusations lodged against him—corporate malfeasance—and his isolation in Poland’s most


notorious maximum-security prison. For two months, Korfanty shared cells and company at the Brześć (Brest-Litovsk) prison with the politicians of the left, but unlike them he faced near-daily beatings and psychological torture. A former Sanacja judge recalled a scene in which the prison official assigned to watch Korfanty—Captain Kazimierz Kaciukiewicz—“called Korfanty out of his cell, shoved him against the wall of the shared latrine, and pummeled his face with his fists, yelling, ‘You’re not running Poland; Piłsudski is!’”

Korfanty left Brześć emaciated and exhausted, and the experience shaped the rest of his political and philosophical career. The principled opponent of Sanacja became a man consumed by his own persecution—some very real, some exaggerated—leading him to equate Piłsudski with Mussolini and Hitler in his subsequent writings. Korfanty’s time at Brześć marked a clear turn in his philosophical commitments, from a more general set of reflections on democracy and authority to an aggressive, nationally minded Catholic antitotalitarianism.

In his political philosophy, Korfanty sought both “true authority” and “true democracy.” Inspired by Jacques Maritain’s *Trois réformateurs,* he attempted to reconcile the two by condemning Luther, Descartes, and Rousseau as the sources of “individualism, liberalism, and pagan humanitarianism” that had weakened democracy and therefore enabled the “statolatrous” (borrowing from Pius XI’s *Non Abbiamo Bisogno*) Piłsudski to take power and claim legitimacy for his dictatorial successors. Korfanty thus came to conceive of democracy not in terms of citizenship or the individual democratic subject (indeed, condemning such approaches as “liberalism”) but rather as a multitiered balancing act—“freedom in keeping with the law,” “individualism with respect for true authority”—necessary to oppose “the state as a leviathan, an omnipotent demi-god, which reaches for man in his entirety, body and soul.”

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37 Lewandowski, *Wojciech Korfanty,* 166.
39 Korfanty himself never invoked Maritain—in line with the role of popularizer in which he cast himself, Korfanty rarely invoked any of his influences by name—but testimony from his closest collaborators attests to the French Thomist’s formative influence. Piwowarczyk, “Nad trumną.”
41 Korfanty, “Charakterystyka,” 92.
This attitude on Korfanty’s part was in conversation with the transnational Catholic turn to antitotalitarianism that James Chappel has described, yet first and foremost it reflected Polish and Silesian singularities. With Hitler’s ascent to the chancellorship of Germany in 1933, Korfanty’s long-standing anti-Germanism made him eager not only to join the transnational chorus of Catholic opponents to Hitler’s construction of a “total state,” but also to identify Piłsudski’s Sanacja regime with Hitler. Not only was Korfanty imprisoned on trumped-up charges and tortured at the hands of the Sanacja in 1930, but an open warrant for his arrest followed him around for the rest of his life, with only his restored parliamentary immunity protecting him from jail. When Sanacja permanently shuttered Upper Silesia’s regional assembly in 1935, Korfanty received an unofficial warning that he could escape prison only by leaving the country. In April 1935, he fled to Prague; four years later, following the Nazi takeover of Czechoslovakia, he moved on to Paris. Yet, in the late spring of 1939, he returned to Poland, leading to his arrest and death under suspicious circumstances.

The thriller-like story of Korfanty’s dealings with the Sanacja-led Polish state shows how personal the stakes were in his forays into political philosophy. At issue was not merely his own thought, but a project of national redemption directed toward both the overthrow of Sanacja and democracy building in Poland. The outcome was a Christian Democratic ideology that—unlike its counterparts across Europe—openly declared that the achievement of a political order consistent with Catholic social teaching necessitated the purging of confessional and national minorities. (In interwar Poland, the two amounted to the same thing.) On the one hand, the antitotalitarian turn brought Korfanty to a proto-rights-talk of his own, after his formative experience of imprisonment and torture at Brześć, but before the core “period of reversal” for Catholic rights-talk identified by Samuel Moyn. On the other hand, this rights-talk was fundamentally exclusionary, and anti-Semitic in particular. However elaborate his extrapolations from natural law and human personhood would become, Korfanty stuck by his assumption that abuses against religion, morality, and democracy in Poland were the result of “the influence of Jewish and Calvinist-Puritan ideas.”

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44 Moyn, “Personalism,” 91.
WHO GETS TO BE A PERSON?

The association of antidemocratic tendencies with Jews and Protestants spoke to one of the core tenets of emerging Polish Christian Democracy, namely the assumption that the Jewish population of Poland was both “demoralizing” Polish society and undermining the success of “Catholic” Polish enterprise. The Sanacja’s advocacy of Jewish civic equality translated into guilt by association for Poland’s Jewish population in the eyes of the Christian Democrats.\(^{46}\) In part, however, this was also a legacy of rural mythologies transmitted from partition-era Poland into a fragmented, brutalized interwar Polish political culture. Hardly the most anti-Semitic political movement in interwar Poland—Brian Porter-Szűcs has rightly described Korfanty as a “political moderate” by the standards of the time\(^ {47}\)—Polish Christian Democracy nonetheless reacted to a prevailing historiosophy. By its terms, the multiconfessionalism and multiculturalism of the 1920s and 1930s were but a legacy of the partition-era shaming of Poles.\(^ {48}\) Korfanty proposed to curtail this shaming by what would amount to a plan for the nonlethal ethnic cleansing of Polish territory.

Korfanty’s hagiographers have maintained that his political pragmatism always tempered his animus toward national minorities, and that Brześć actually pushed him to seek allies against Piłsudski from among all national minorities. That said, aside from blanket denials of Korfanty’s anti-Semitism, his biographers do not touch on his writings on the “Jewish question.”\(^ {49}\) Rather, the discussion of Korfanty’s stance on national minorities encounters the heuristic problem of papering over the status of Jews by focusing on other national minorities. This corresponded to a broader European trend noted by Mark Mazower with respect to Central and Eastern Europe’s progressive pivoting away from the League of Nations minority treaties:

Once the League’s prestige waned, East European states—starting with Poland—ceased to bother with their formal obligations either toward their minorities, and in fact began to follow Germany in implementing boycotts, the numerus clausus, and other similar

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\(^{48}\) One of its key exponents was historian Feliks Koneczny (1862–1949). On Koneczny see Joanna Beata Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present* (Lincoln, NE, 2006), 109–30.

discriminatory policies, in an obvious effort to reduce Jews in particular to second-class status and to encourage them to leave.\textsuperscript{50}

The outcome of this confusion with respect to Korfanty’s story is that, while his hagiographers are not entirely wrong, they miss the heart of the matter. True, the partitioning of Upper Silesia in 1922 following Korfanty’s successful leadership of the Third Silesian Uprising meant that he could shift from fighting Germans to negotiating international trade with them. Eight years later, his release from Brześć led him to seek anti-Sanacja allies among German and Ukrainian minority politicians in Poland. But these were all Christians, and that made a fundamental difference in terms of Korfanty’s reading of the Catholic notion of personhood. He saw no place for Jews in a sociopolitical order structured in keeping with \textit{Rerum Novarum} and \textit{Quadragesimo Anno}, and his close identification of Jews with the hated Sanacja meant that he saw neither principled nor practical reasons to seek with them the kind of reconciliation that Brześć drove him to seek with Christian Germans and Ukrainians. As he put it in a November 1932 speech at the Christian Democratic party congress in Łódź, “Imposing limitations on the license exercised by the minority is a necessary condition for the freedom of the majority.”\textsuperscript{51} The only exception seemed to be Korfanty’s Brześć cellmate, Herman Lieberman, to whom Korfanty even apologized before evening prayers once for “doing in a shared cell something that might seem strange, if not indeed undesirable.” Yet in neither Korfanty’s writings nor in his biographies does one ever find Lieberman identified as a Polish Jew—only as a “socialist and freethinker.”\textsuperscript{52}

In the years immediately following his Brześć imprisonment, Korfanty’s reading of Maritain led him to focus on a Thomist-inspired doctrine of the dignity and rights of human personhood.\textsuperscript{53} In his first written use of the term “personhood,” Korfanty wrote, “Thrust upon our political livelihood has been the idea of the state as a leviathan, an omnipotent demi-god, which reaches for man in his entirety, body and soul. It refuses man his natural rights and


\textsuperscript{51} Quoted in Balawajder, “Katolicyzm społeczny,” 125.


moral personhood, and it fails to acknowledge human dignity.”\(^{54}\) Cherry-picking references from *Quadragesimo Anno* and *Non Abbiamo Bisogno* to support many of his claims, Korfanty outpaced Pius XI by four years with his doctrine of rights-endowed personhood.\(^{55}\)

Personalism in its Polish variant emerged in vigorous conversation with, among others, Thomist philosophy. Of particular importance were the writings of Jacques Maritain, who was first published in Polish in 1926 and who visited Poland in 1934.\(^{56}\) Korfanty read both Maritain and his inspiration, Thomas Aquinas; his notion that human personhood was a function of man having been made in God’s image was hardly original. It is worth underscoring, however, that the exclusionary nature of Polish Christian Democratic personalism followed from constraints placed on who could qualify as having been made in God’s image. Quite simply, by the terms of contemporary Thomist thought, personhood was arguably posterior, not prior, to faith. Thus a strict reading of personhood constrained the concept’s application to Catholic Christians who had personally experienced faith.

Fundamentally contradictory as this constraint may seem to the universality of the *Imago Dei*, this was the mainstream view in the pre-Vatican II Catholic Church. As late as 1948, one Karol Wojtyła—a World War II-era Christian Democratic resistance movement activist, a postwar student of Thomist authority Rev. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, and the future Pope John Paul II—explained in his PhD dissertation that, because original sin had deprived humanity of its “essential likeness” with God, the only humans who qualified for the *Imago Dei* were Christians who had achieved “union with God” through “witness of personal experience.”\(^{57}\) Translation: the dignity of human personhood and, by extension, the rights that this dignity implied were the purview only of practicing Catholics. As with the Hungarian Jewish converts to Catholicism studied by Paul Hanebrink, baptism alone was insufficient to bestow a recognizable human personhood.

Wojtyła’s early writings are noteworthy both because he later became Pope and because he wrote them within a few years of his World War II activism.

\(^{54}\) Korfanty, “Nowy Rok,” 143.


as a member of the Christian Democratic resistance inspired by Korfanty’s writings. Yet it suffices to look at the writings of figures more contemporary with Korfanty to see that his was no isolated voice. Rev. Stefan Wyszyński, after 1948 primate of Poland, but already in the 1930s a leading Catholic intellectual and seminary professor, developed in the years leading up to World War II a fusion of nationalism and personalism, arguing that Catholic notions of the person had “grown over the ages to be an organic part of the honorable spirit of the nation.”58 The Thomist philosopher Stefan Swieżawski—who had studied in Paris under both Maritain and Etienne Gilson—had already gone much farther, attempting principled justification of the anti-Semitic numerus clausus: “we must defend our particular Polish culture from a deluge by the bankrupt Jewish culture, particularly in education, art, and social mores, and at the same time strengthen and expand as energetically as possible our economic wealth.”59 These words were penned not by a politician like Korfanty, but by a scholar who was perhaps twentieth-century Poland’s greatest expert on Thomism and the Catholic philosophy of the human person.

Anti-German, antitotalitarian, and therefore anti-Nazi as Korfanty had become by 1933, his exclusionary personalism nonetheless led him to a vision of democracy and its incumbent rights that would not only segregate its citizens, but indeed sponsor policies that threatened the fundamental freedoms of all. On the one hand, Korfanty repeatedly declared “inviolable” and “sacred” by “natural law” from 1933 onward a set of concrete rights: “freedom of conscience, free will, and the capacity to make use of all means necessary to carry out the will of God. These rights constitute human personhood and dignity, and from them follows a sense of responsibility for our actions.”60 “Human solidarity” was to be the governing precept of democratic society. And yet Korfanty believed also that “Christian morality” and the requirements of “true democracy” in “a new Christian civilization” occasionally required state intervention. His resultant advocacies were occasionally so extreme as to recall Nazism itself: “it would behoove us in the name of the good of nation and state to follow the example

58 Stefan Wyszyński, Kultura bolszewizmu i inteligencja polska (Włocławek, 1934), 32.
60 Wojciech Korfanty, “Moralność katolicka a wybory” (18 Aug. 1935), in Korfanty, Naród, Państwo, Kościół, 244–7, at 245.
of Austria and Hitlerite Germany in cleansing our press, literature, and so-called science and art.”

Other examples of the contradictions internal to Korfanty’s rights-talk are legion. Having for almost a decade impugned the “rights of the individual” as derivative of the Reformation, Scientific Revolution, and Enlightenment, Korfanty in 1936 nonetheless claimed,

Liberty, equality, and fraternity are not necessarily fortunate turns of phrase; they need to be amended with a demand for Christian justice, about which 19th-century democracy entirely forgot. But calls for liberty, equality, and fraternity underscore the claim to respect for the dignity of human personhood, the inviolability of the natural rights of man, and the equality of the citizen before law, which all other regimes forget all too easily. For these are definitively Christian claims.

As a result, “the first of the ‘Rights of Man’ is respect for his personhood and his natural rights.”

The explanation for these contradictions lies in part in Korfanty’s attention to contemporary international events—Hitler’s consolidation of dictatorial power, growing instability in the French Third Republic, and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War—and in part in his adaptation of lessons drawn from observing those developments to shifts within Sanacja’s governance of Poland. Piłsudski died in 1935, yet Poland remained a parliamentary dictatorship controlled by his military and political protégés until the outbreak of World War II. If anything, Piłsudski’s death dealt an even greater blow to the rule of law in Poland than his 1926 coup had, as the glue thereby disappeared that had held together disparate factions of the Sanacja camp. The resulting power struggles at national and regional levels necessitated several waves of martial law lasting until the eve of World War II.

Two years into the exile that he embraced to avoid torture in a Sanacja prison, Korfanty prepared two articles in 1937 that together constituted his attempt to define “democracy.” In the first article, he declared,

Democracy is a negative value, for as its only goal it takes struggle against evil, lawlessness, and injustice. This negative value of democracy, this struggle against evil and injustice has an inestimable significance for humanity’s struggle for truth, law, and justice. It is

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precisely as a negative value that democracy constitutes one of the greatest achievements of the human spirit, for it constitutes a dam against evil, arbitrariness, and anarchy.  

Seven months later, announcing the fusion of his old Christian Democratic party with the Pomerania-based National Labor Party (Narodowa Partia Robotnicza) into a new pan-Christian Democratic movement called the Labor Front (Stronnictwo Pracy, hereafter SP), Korfanty explained how his new party aimed to translate that “negative” concept of democracy into political practice. His plan was to build a “Christian civilization,” something along the lines of the personalist, illiberal *nouvelle chrétienté* envisioned by Maritain in his 1936 *Humanisme intégral*.  

Korfanty wrote,

> We are democrats and advocates of parliamentary government. For us, democracy is a constant process of perfecting man and realizing the Christian order in the life of the state. Our democracy is not merely the right to deposit a voting card and the right to participate in government and to take responsibility for the fate of the state, but also the organization of economic and cultural life according to Christian principles, far from the costly statism of dictatorial regimes, as from the tyranny of the capitalism that turns our lives to anarchy. Our democracy lies in the reconstruction of the true authority of power without infringement on the sacred rights of human personhood and civic freedom. All dictatorships are symptomatic of sickness in the life of the state, while democracy is its normal condition, its healthy state.  

As we see in this definition, for Korfanty, “true” democracy thus implied also “true” authority, combining Catholic antitotalitarianism with an illiberal, corporatist doctrine of sovereignty. The only wild card remaining in this definition was the phrase “civic freedom,” which—attached as it seemed to be to “human personhood”—applied only to human persons, i.e. believing Catholics. Indeed, it is this limited, illiberal notion of “civic freedom” that returns us to Paul Hanebrink’s phraseology of the “rights of (Christian) man.” Without explicitly classifying Jews as subhuman, Wojciech Korfanty—and his counterparts in Hungary and elsewhere—made it clear that civic freedom was contingent on human personhood, which in turn was by God’s grace alone, i.e. exclusive to those who belonged to the faith. In the Hungarian case analyzed by Hanebrink, this exclusionary criterion found its liminal cases among Jewish converts to Catholicism, on whose behalf the Hungarian Church would argue

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during World War II (albeit with a fragmented voice and therefore also with limited results). 67

Meanwhile, in Poland, while the World War II-era Episcopate would follow a similar approach of advocacy on behalf of Poland’s Jewish converts to Catholicism, a mere two years before the outbreak of war, the newly unified Christian Democrats of SP led the charge toward an ethnic cleansing of the Polish state. Korfanty drafted SP’s party platform in October 1937 to highlight commitments to “the high ideals of the freedom and dignity of man” and “[f]reedom of conscience” as “one of the most sacred accomplishments of Christianity and at once one of Poland’s most beautiful traditions. On this foundation we rest our toleration of other faiths, to the extent that their principles are not in contradiction with public morality and common good.” A mere page and a half later, however, the party platform included an entire heading devoted to enabling (Christian) Poles to be “masters in their own home,” cited here in full:

The Jewish question has for us a separate, ever more pressing significance. The good of the Polish nation and state suffer dramatically as a result of the sizable overpopulation of Jews, their social and territorial distribution, and above all also their moral oddities and political and social tendencies, remarkably harmful for our economic, cultural, and moral interests. We will achieve resolution of the burning Jewish question above all through support of Polish economic and cultural creativity; progressive transformation of the capitalist order; expansion of Polish social and private property; development of Polish industry, commerce, and artisanry; as well as the independent trades and cooperative movement. The Polish authorities and society ought to work together to execute the planned mass Jewish emigration. Legislation will guarantee the acceleration of the process of the return to the nation of Polish economic, political, cultural, and social life. 68

This was a national political platform, so it is perhaps unsurprising to see so much repetition of the words “nation” and “national,” yet this passage amounted to a Christian Democratic declaration of programmatic intent to carry out ethnic cleansing against Poland’s Jews.

Beyond residual hang-ups over the legacy of 123 years of partitioned Poland, Korfanty seemed to harken back to the tradition of Polish national messianism that dated to Adam Mickiewicz and his fellow Romantic–revolutionary poets of the mid-nineteenth century. While free of anti-Semitic content, their poetry had located Poland at the center of a mystical doctrine of salvation that purported to restore not only the Polish state, but indeed order throughout

67 Nonetheless, “Converts had rights worth defending precisely because they were not Jews.” Hanebrink, Christian Hungary, 179.
the European continent. It is in the SP party platform, written personally by Korfanty, that we see the revival of this messianism, restyled and fused with both an illiberal personalist rights-talk and a violent rejection of Piłsudskite multiconfessional multiculturalism. Brian Porter’s description of Roman Dmowski’s instrumentalization of the Romantic legacy describes equally effectively its appropriation by Korfanty: “the patriotism of 1830 and 1863, of Mickiewicz, and the Polish Democratic Society, did not simply ‘develop’ into the nationalism of Roman Dmowski.” The logic of Korfanty’s Catholic rights-talk was thus that, together, the pan-European consequences of the Reformation, Scientific Revolution, and Enlightenment—nourished by “Jewish and Calvinist-Protestant” thinking—bred a liberal individualism that steered Piłsudski and his followers toward a total state at the very moment when, after 123 years of statelessness, Poles had the opportunity to be fulfilled as Catholic persons in a nation endowed with a special, God-given role. For Korfanty, Jews were essentially capitalist, which made their continued presence incompatible with “a new Christian socioeconomic order.” As a consequence, the removal of “non-persons”—Jews above all—became a sine qua non for the material as well as spiritual fulfillment of Polish Catholics as a nation.

Baffling and offensive as this kind of reasoning should be to a twenty-first-century readership, it was arguably a logical extension of the pre-Nostra Aetate Church teaching on relations between Catholics and non-Catholics—and particularly between Catholics and Jews. Reformist Central European interfaith thinking of the kind described by John Connelly—marginal at best even in Connelly’s case study of Austria—was entirely absent from interwar Poland. In practice, it had indeed been Piłsudski’s Sanacja dictatorship that had stemmed the tide of Polish ethnic-cleansing advocacy from the very beginning of the interwar period, not the Catholic Church.

Korfanty’s case, while deeply influenced by Silesian and Polish singularities alike, thus offers a remarkable lens on the ease with which theologically embedded Catholic anti-Judaism facilitated a turn to anti-Semitic advocacies by Catholics otherwise devoted to promoting social justice. This was more than the anti-Judaism that characterized many of the otherwise reformist Catholic thinkers of the interwar years—like Maritain or the Austrian Jesuit Georg Bichlmair—but at once neither racist nor eliminationist along the lines of Rev. Jozef Tiso,

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70 Porter, Nationalism Began to Hate, 236.
71 Balawajder, “Katolicyzm społeczny,” 139.
72 Connelly, From Enemy to Brother, 94–146.
73 Ibid., 117–21. On Bichlmair see ibid., 120.
Slovakia’s Nazi-aligned dictator during World War II. For Korfanty, the problem was at its core a confessional one: Jews as a “nation” could not be Christian, which meant that, as a “nation,” they were distinct from Poles. This ethnicization of Judaism was a transnational feature of Central European Catholicism that followed from the anti-Judaism that the universal Church maintained as core doctrine until 1965.

What is noteworthy in the Polish case is not the existence and prominence of politically, theologically, and philosophically mainstream anti-Semitism, but rather the fact that this anti-Semitism was so bound up in the logic of Christian Democratic rights-talk. This is a story not merely of a rights-talk confined to the “(Christian) man,” but indeed of a Catholic rights-talk integrally bound up with the project of homogenizing the Polish state. While personalism would survive, flourish, and multiply across a wide range of strains in Poland both during and after World War II, rights-talk collapsed in the course of the war. Although Christian Democracy and its calls for “national freedoms” survived World War II, by the arrival of Stalinism and Cold War exile, the near-total annihilation of Polish Jewry seems to have eliminated the basis for a Catholic rights-talk in postwar Poland—even in the face of a new dictatorship effected by Joseph Stalin and the Red Army.

CHRISTIAN HUMANISM AND NATIONAL CAPTIVITY

Following the capitulation of Polish armed forces to Hitler’s invading armies in October 1939, some of the SP leadership went into exile, while others went underground, reconstituting SP’s field organization as a clandestine resistance movement working together with Poland’s underground Home Army. In both cases, past experience of political dissidence, as embodied specifically by Korfanty, weighed heavily. Indeed, Poland’s London government consisted of ministers mostly affiliated not with Sanacja, but with the various parties united against it before 1939. For Christian Democratic, National Democratic, and Peasant Party leaders alike, Korfanty had become a martyr whose death literally resulted from political persecution by the Sanacja regime. General Władysław Sikorski, Poland’s wartime prime minister until his death in 1943, had lent his support to a cross-party program of national unity developed by Korfanty in 1936—the so-called

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75 On its 1965 reversal see Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother*, esp. 239–72.
Front Morges—in anticipation of Sanacja’s eventual fall from power. It is in this way that Karol Popiel, SP cofounder with Korfanty in 1937 and his successor as SP chairman in 1939, found his way into the exile government as well.\footnote{Jarosław Rabieński, Stronnictwo Pracy we władzach naczelnych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej na uchodźstwie w latach 1939–1945 (Lublin, 2012).}

By the time of Nazi Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the SP organization remaining on Polish soil had morphed into a well-developed resistance network. One year later, it merged with a larger umbrella Catholic resistance movement rooted in both parish-level and cultural–intellectual networks. This larger movement, Unia (Union), embraced SP’s Christian Democratic identity while sporting a wide range of resistance activism, from armed guerrilla fighting to clandestine theater performances (by, for example, the future John Paul II).\footnote{On Unia, see the memoirs of its cofounder: Jan Hoppe, Wspomnienia, przyczynki, refleksje (London, 1972).} One entire node of Unia’s nonviolent resistance wing was called Zegota. Starting as a project of the Underground State to save baptized Jewish children, it eventually morphed into an umbrella organization for coordinating efforts to manufacture false papers and to smuggle out of Poland Jews being hidden by non-Jewish Poles.\footnote{On Zegota see Irene Tomaszewski and Tecia Werbowski, Zegota: The Council for Aid to Jews in Occupied Poland (Montréal, 1999); Jan T. Gross, Strach: Antysemityzm w Polsce tuż po wojnie: Historia moralnej zapaści (Kraków, 2008), 321.}

The Holocaust completely devastated the Jewish population of Poland, whose occupied territory became the epicenter of Nazi-driven mass murder. Both the London government and the Home Army gathered extensive information on each successive stage of the Holocaust for transmission to the Allies.\footnote{Poland’s “courier” who brought information about the Holocaust to the United States in 1943 was Jan Karski. Jan Karski, Story of a Secret State: My Report to the World (Washington, 2013). On the London government see David Engel, Facing a Holocaust: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1943–1945 (Chapel Hill, 1993).} Despite Zegota’s efforts, it is difficult to define precisely the extent of SP–Unia’s involvement in Holocaust rescue or the influence of the Zegota campaign on Christian Democratic ideology. What we do know is that Zegota prioritized efforts to smuggle Jews out of Poland over hiding them on Polish soil. Moreover, Jerzy Braun, a Catholic philosopher closely tied to the Zegota efforts who also served as the last clandestine wartime liaison between the exile government and the Polish underground resistance, wrote to a colleague at the war’s end that there is no place today in our villages and towns for the Jew. In the course of the past six years in Poland (at long last!), a Polish third estate has emerged . . . In this situation, it is understandable that Jewish survivors of the pogroms cannot return to their place of birth and thus instead “emigrate, ruined and broken, announcing to the world that Poles are
masters in their own home?” Yet what they take for anti-Semitism is “simply a law of economics, about which nothing can be done.”

Setting aside the brutality of such a statement made in the summer of 1945 on territory that had until just recently served as ground zero for the Holocaust, one must consider Braun’s statement as significant evidence of the fundamental continuity between interwar and postwar Christian Democratic thinking. Braun himself was not the political leader of SP at the war’s end, but he emerged from his work in Unia as its principal ideologue; the arrest warrant issued for him by Poland’s Communist secret police at the onset of Polish Stalinism in 1948 would say as much. Despite the utter depravity of the Holocaust, Braun—in the 1940s one of Poland’s most vocal exponents of Catholic social teaching—followed in Korfanty’s footsteps, making the case for a consonance between the Nazi effort to eliminate Poland’s Jews and the SP project declared in 1937 of removing all Jews from Polish territory.

There is no evidence of genocidal or eliminationist intent on the part of Polish Christian Democrats, but it is clear that the logic of Catholic Poles as “masters in their own home” had survived the war’s horrors intact. Indeed, until the start of Polish Stalinism in 1948—when it was no longer possible to doubt that Moscow was steering the Polish state—this logic seemed to have reigned triumphant. Jews had mostly disappeared from Polish territory as a result of the Holocaust (and, in the immediate postwar, Catholic antagonism toward the returning survivors, which took the form, among others, of a pogrom in Kielce in July 1946); Ukrainians and Belarussians as a result of the incorporation of eastern Poland into the USSR; and Germans as a result of the redefinition of Poland’s western border, accompanied by deportations per the Allied agreement at Potsdam. For the first time in Poland’s history, more than 90 percent of its inhabitants were Catholic.

81 Quoted at Gross, Strach, 62–3.
It is essential to keep postwar Poland’s demographics in mind as one considers that, after the conclusion of World War II, the notion of “rights of the human person” slowly disappeared from Polish Christian Democratic discourse. Even after 1948—when most of SP’s activists were either in exile or in Stalinist prisons—the word “rights” was nowhere to be found, whether in émigré propaganda or in the transcripts of interrogations during which Poland’s secret police beat confessions out of imprisoned SP activists.

The last written traces of Polish Christian Democratic rights-talk date from 1945–6. These, however, represent an exception to the overall trajectory of SP. Reverend Jan Piwowarczyk was one of interwar Poland’s foremost authorities on Catholic social teaching, and he and Korfanty consulted regularly throughout the 1930s. Piwowarczyk’s textbook *Katolicka etyka społeczna* (Catholic Social Ethics) had gone through four editions in fifteen years in the 1930s and 1940s. Piwowarczyk had prepared in 1933 the official Polish translations of *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*; well-liked in the Holy See, Piwowarczyk had long been prized within Polish Christian Democracy for his connections to Rome.85 Having spent the war in hiding or under arrest, he later emerged as cofounder of a major new Catholic weekly named *Tygodnik Powszechny* (Universal Weekly) as well as unnamed author of many of the key SP platform documents of the years 1945 and 1946, prior to the SP’s cooptation and Karol Popiel’s decision to call for the party’s suspension.86 It is in Piwowarczyk’s 1945 articles in *Tygodnik Powszechny* and 1946 party platform writings that we find the last instances of Catholic rights-talk in Poland until after the Second Vatican Council.

In the first postwar years, Communist and Catholic journals competed for the opportunity to shape the worldviews of the young intelligentsia who had survived the war. Some Communist periodicals—like the literary critic Stefan Żółkiewski’s *Kuźnica* (Ironworks)—were oriented toward Moscow, while others—like Jerzy Borejsza’s *Rzeczpospolita*—expressed a willingness to work with all “non-fascists,” a category that included Christian Democrats.87 That “gentle revolutionary” atmosphere explains the initial success of three different weekly journals of the Catholic intelligentsia founded in 1945: *Tygodnik Powszechny*—started in Kraków by Piwowarczyk and his lay protégé Jerzy Turowicz under Kraków Archbishop Sapieha’s patronage; *Tygodnik Warszawski* (Warsaw Weekly), a lay project initiated by Primate Hlond and staffed principally by Christian Democrats; and *Dziś i Jutro* (Today and Tomorrow), the creation of the

ex-fascist éminence grise Bolesław Piasecki, which openly declared as its mission the pursuit of Catholic–Marxist partnership. The three weeklies initially had overlapping political profiles, although the three met dramatically different fates after 1948. While Tygodnik Powszechny restricted itself to the realm of culture and literature and therefore managed to keep publishing until 1953, Dziś i Jutro proceeded in lockstep with Stalinism. Meanwhile, the Tygodnik Warszawski editors and writers landed in interrogation rooms, court rooms, and prison cells, with several dying of physical exhaustion along the way.

In the first issue of Tygodnik Powszechny, published on 24 March 1945—just after the liberation of Kraków—Piwowarczyk offered an article entitled “Toward a Catholic Poland.” His vision for postwar Poland rested on an alliance of Catholicism and democracy, in the spirit of which he invoked the French ralliement of the 1890s, declaring, “In a day when ‘democracy’ is synonymous with progress, let us recall that Leo XIII personally elevated and blessed at St Peter’s Basilica the banners of French democracy.” Aside from taking a jab at the declared “progressivism” of the people’s democracy that Poland’s Soviet-backed interim government had commenced building already in July 1944, Piwowarczyk made clear that he understood the intersection of Catholicism and democracy to lie in a personalist-inspired rights-talk predicated on “rights and responsibilities” of citizens conscious of their status as “human persons” in a state that exists only to “offer security” to a “greater number of human persons having a purpose in themselves.”

Piwowarczyk’s rationale implied not only a return to Catholic antitotalitarianism, but also the incorporation of elements of liberal “civic rights” that Korfanty had rejected. In Piwowarczyk’s eyes, there was no contradiction between Catholic personalism and a liberal rights-talk, for “the Church imprinted upon humanity Christian personalism, conscious of responsibilities and rights, rendering unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s, and unto God that which is God’s.”

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This is clearly not the writing of Wojciech Korfanty. Nonetheless, as both a recognized authority on Catholic social teaching with the ear of the Holy See and as a war hero who had survived Gestapo persecution, Rev. Piwowarczyk’s voice counted in postwar SP debates. In his unsigned 1946 “Appeal of the ‘Christian SP’ to the Polish Nation,” Piwowarczyk combined certain tropes from interwar SP ideology—for example, the essential combination of “freedom of the nation and the dignity of man” with the rejection of “all totalistic forms”—while declaring “equal rights for all.” And yet even that call for equal rights reprised the exclusionary nationalism of SP’s original party platform: “Following the loss of the eastern lands and the recovery of the motherlands on the Oder and Neisse, Poland is a nationally homogeneous state. In Poland, the nation is master, the state is the means for realization of its historical aspirations.”

Free as this declaration is from any reference to the Holocaust or to interwar SP writings on the “Jewish question,” the lofty praise of the “nationally homogeneous state” that Poland had become is a corollary to the 1937 declaration that SP wanted Poles to be “masters in their own home.” The 1946 SP appeal concludes with a declaration of the party’s intent to pursue “Slavic unity,” to support the United Nations, and to make as many contacts as possible throughout Europe, suggesting a substantial toning down of the national messianism underlying Korfanty’s writings. Nonetheless, the continuity is clear with both Korfanty’s oeuvre (invoked by name in the appeal) and with Braun’s 1945 statement.

That was the last Polish-language document published by SP in which the word “rights” appeared together with the words “dignity” and “person.” This is rather extraordinary when one considers the fact that SP by 1946 had already become a target for political repressions, that within a year part of its leadership would flee into exile, and that the remaining leadership would face forced confessions and show trials beginning in 1948. Piwowarczyk may have had his own reasons for muzzling his rights-talk, namely to avoid endangering Tygodnik Powszechny. As SP faced increased persecution, he published fewer and fewer articles in that journal, and what he did write concerned increasingly esoteric theology that state censors left untouched.

Jerzy Braun, however, took up SP’s ideological mantle from Piwowarczyk. Unconnected to Tygodnik Powszechny, Braun in 1947 became Tygodnik Warszawski’s editor-in-chief. By then, SP had been definitively coopted by Communist agents provocateurs, and Tygodnik Warszawski had become the mouthpiece of refugees from the coopted party. Braun published long articles

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91 Mirosław Piotrowski, Służba idei czy serwilizm? Zygmunt Felczak i Feliks Widy-Wirski w najnowszych dziejach Polski (Lublin, 1994).
each week expounding on “Christian humanism” and social ethics. Initially, he preserved the language of human personhood and natural law in Tygodnik Warszawski. None of these writings, however, served the programmatic function that Korfanty’s and later Piwowarchyk’s texts had.

Braun’s April 1947 article “Christian Humanism” lauded the titular idea as “necessary for the development of the rights-based traits of human personhood.” But again, there was no statement of what those rights were or how they concretely related to the political reality in which the journal’s readership was living.92 The only time that the phrase “human rights” appeared in Tygodnik Warszawski was in a September 1947 article that reflected on the intellectual history of the 1789 French Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen without drawing any connections to contemporary events, to Catholicism, or to the realm of politics.93

It is a foregone conclusion that, given ever-greater encroachment by state censors, Tygodnik Warszawski authors had to communicate to some extent in code when discussing topics that might have been construed as criticism of postwar Poland’s emerging Communist regime. Yet this does not change the fact that, over the course of 144 issues, the word “rights” appeared in only a handful of articles, and when the word did appear, it bore no resemblance to its interwar placement at the very center of Korfanty’s vision for Polish Christian Democracy. This is all the more noteworthy in light of the extent to which the phrase “human rights” became an international watchword in the years immediately following World War II, preceding the 1948 adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (Poland abstained from this vote in the United Nations.) In August 1947, an unsigned editorial in the Polish Communist-run daily Rzeczpospolita declared that the Tygodnik Warszawski staff were “philosophizing on behalf of foreign agents about personalism, the sovereign rights of the individual, the autonomy of the spirit.”94 Given the Christian Democrats’ turn away from rights-talk, however, this accusation missed its mark.

While it is possible that Braun and his Tygodnik Warszawski colleagues kept their rights-talk to a minimum to forestall the prison sentences that they would incur in any event beginning in 1948, this explanation does not account for their self-exiled colleagues who escaped Poland when it was still possible—including Karol Popiel, the chairman of Stronnictwo Pracy. In the many articles, press releases, and official documents that SP émigrés produced over the course of four decades—the party survived in bare-bones form until 1990—not one ever returned to Catholic rights-talk. Under Popiel’s leadership, several dozen

94 Rzeczpospolita, 27 Aug. 1947, quoted in Zabłocki, Chrześcijańska Demokracja, 218 n. 69.

Not only did rights-talk fail to play any substantial role in the Christian Democrats’ self-presentation, but indeed the language of human personhood disappeared completely from their publications—Polish-language and otherwise—as soon as they left Polish territory. Instead, while retaining the “Christian Democratic” label for the duration of their existence, the SP exiles retreated to claims about sovereignty, captivity, and totalitarianism. A thorough reading of successive issues of the bulletin \textit{Odnowa} (Renewal) that SP published in New York between 1952 and 1956 (and in London thereafter) reveals not a single appearance of either “rights” or “person.”\footnote{While, in English, the terms “person” and “people” are common in everyday usage, one would be more likely in casual Polish-language usage to speak of \textit{człowiek} and \textit{ludzie} (the gender-neutral equivalents of “man” and “men”). As a result, it is easier to infer in Polish how conscious the choice of terms was.} An article entitled “Totalitarianism” published in December 1952, while praising both Wojciech Korfanty and Karol Popiel for having opposed the “totalitarianism” of Piłsudski, limits the damage done by totalitarianism to encroachment on the following elements: “moral order, political democracy, social justice, security of the family, ethical upbringing of the youth.”\footnote{“Totalitaryzm,” \textit{Odnowa}, 12 (1952), 4–5, at 5.} The Polish Catholic antitotalitarianism of the 1950s had lost the core elements of personalism and rights-talk, and even the phrases “total state” and “statolatry” had disappeared entirely from the SP vocabulary.

Instead, the SP exiles chose to resurrect the language of struggle for “national freedom” and sovereignty, with the Soviet Union as their new target. As a result, a favorite watchword of \textit{Odnowa} articles became “captivity.” And—with the English-language publication of the recent defector Czesław Miłosz’s \textit{Captive Mind} in 1953\footnote{Czesław Miłosz, \textit{The Captive Mind}, trans. Jane Zielonko (New York, 1953).}—successive articles in \textit{Odnowa} described specific aspects of Poland’s Stalinization as “examples of the process masterfully rendered by Czesław
Miłosz in his book *Captive Mind*.”

Perhaps this was a tactical calculation on the part of SP exiles coming from a Communist country and producing a bulletin in Polish in the United States at the height of McCarthyism. Either way, the political language of Polish Christian Democracy had undergone a complete transformation by the mid-1950s, losing first its rights-talk, then its personalism, and ultimately any hint of theology aside from an ill-defined vocabulary of “morality” and “family.”

The one phrase from the Korfanty era that the SP exiles chose to preserve and to propagate within the émigré-driven CDUCE was “true democracy.” That said, the very means by which they deployed this term underscore the evolution that it had undergone in Polish Christian Democratic discourse since Korfanty’s first written use of it in 1930. First, after World War II, the term appeared only in French- or English-language documents produced for a wider audience, never in internal Polish-language party documents. Second, the term “true democracy” was wedded to an entirely secularized vocabulary of resistance and “fundamental rights” borrowed from the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man—“the violation of the fundamental rights of the individual” (not the person), “restriction of religious freedom and freedom of instruction, of freedom of movement”—with no input from the home-grown Polish Christian Democratic rights-talk of the 1930s. Indeed, by the mid-1950s, Popiel might have retained some memory of Korfanty’s 1930s use of the term “true democracy,” but he undoubtedly associated the term more—as did Christian Democratic exiles from other Soviet bloc countries—with Pope Pius XII’s 1944 Christmas message.

**CONCLUSION**

A fundamental shift took place in Polish Christian Democratic ideology and rhetoric as a result of World War II. Catholic rights-talk went from being the central element of Wojciech Korfanty’s exclusionary personalist political vision for the Polish nation, to appearing only in trace form in the pages of a postwar SP journal under siege, to disappearing entirely in the early Cold War rhetoric of SP exile activists manning a transnational, Euro-American lobby network. Though rooted in Polish singularity, Korfanty’s rights-talk had engaged transnational Catholic conversations about the human person and

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100 *La démocratie chrétienne de l’Europe centrale: Union Chrétienne–Démocrate de l’Europe centrale* (limited circulation pamphlet, 1956), 5, August-Edmond De Schryver Papers 7.2.11/1, Archives of the KADOC Research Center, Leuven.
101 See [www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius12/P12XMAS.HTM](http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius12/P12XMAS.HTM), consulted 6 March 2013.
totalitarianism. Cold War or no Cold War, then, it is curious that Korfanty’s successors cut themselves off entirely from his rights-talk after actually going out into the world to dialogue, among others, with the Western European Christian Democratic parties inspired by Korfanty’s various interlocutors of the 1930s.

One of the premises of Korfanty’s exclusionary rights-talk had been its presumed political utility against Piłsudski. Christian Democracy’s identification of Piłsudski as protector of Poland’s Jewish population underlined the imperative of denying personhood to Jews in a post-Sanacja Poland. Indeed, by the time of the outbreak of World War II, even as Korfanty suffered dramatic political repressions that ultimately killed him, he continued to insist on making Poles “masters in their own home,” which presupposed the ethnic cleansing of all Jews from Polish territory.

Nonetheless, after World War II, even though it quickly became clear that Communists had become Poland’s “masters,” the Christian Democrats advocated neither the removal of Communists from Polish territory, nor a complete severance of ties with the Soviet Union. Unlike the well-defined rights-talk of the 1930s, postwar Polish Christian Democrats promoted only vague and limited concepts of democracy and national sovereignty that, in the end, belied their exponents’ willingness to work with Soviet-supported governments. On the whole, then, the atheist Soviet-backed postwar government proved less inimical than Poland’s interwar Jewish population to Polish Christian Democrats’ understanding of the dignity of the human person. The result was the virtual erasure of rights-talk from postwar Christian Democrats’ writings even as they became more and more active at the transnational level—leaving rights-talk to be taken up instead by young Catholic socialists moving toward dissidence and, ultimately, a decisive role in Poland’s exit from communism.

The deep embedding of Korfanty’s Catholic rights-talk in the interwar “Jewish question” left his postwar successors adrift. Perhaps these successors—Piwowarczyk, Braun, Popiel—suppressed the interwar rights-talk out of a sense of shame, disagreement, or political correctness? In 1937, Popiel had cosigned the SP party platform that included SP’s commitment to push for the ethnic cleansing of Jews from Polish territory; in 1945, Braun had written that the Holocaust had been “simply a law of economics, about which nothing can be done.” Of the authors examined in this article, only Piwowarczyk had never contributed to the anti-Semitism of SP rights-talk, yet even he concluded his draft of the 1946 SP appeal by lauding the fact that Poland had come out of the war a “nationally homogeneous state.” Piwowarczyk’s colleagues at Tygodnik Powszechny had made a public statement decrying the infamous Kielce Pogrom of Holocaust survivors in July 1946 as “the trampling of divine law and the shaming of Poland’s good name in the world.” Yet Piwowarczyk, while recovering from an illness at a distant
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sanatorium, wrote to his coeditor Jerzy Turowicz to urge against the printing of such a declaration.\textsuperscript{102}

The case of Poland, therefore, demonstrates that a strong Christian Democratic movement and a firm embedding in transnational European conversations about personalism were insufficient to ensure a liberalizing trajectory for Catholic rights-talk. Ascendant as the concept of the human person was in interwar, wartime, and postwar Catholic debates in Poland (even at the height of Stalinism), the notion that human personhood implied a rights-driven political program disappeared almost entirely from Polish Catholic discourse between 1939 and the Second Vatican Council of 1962–5. In the 1940s and 1950s, Polish Christian Democrats fell entirely out of the orbit of Catholic rights-talk, promoting instead a concept of “democracy” pegged entirely to national freedom with no attention to the human person.

The jettisoning of rights-talk by Polish Christian Democrats was, in part, undoubtedly linked to their expectation that their political exile would not be brief. Unlike Korfanty, who developed his rights-talk while in open dissidence against Piłsudski on Polish soil and then went into what he expected to be a brief exile, postwar SP émigrés understood that they might have left Poland for good. They did not reject the prospect of political participation in the Communist system—in fact sending the émigré activist Seweryn Eustachiewicz to Poland on false papers in 1955 on a mission of reconnaissance\textsuperscript{103}—but they invested the bulk of their energy in long-term planning, starting with the “matter of training new cadres” with the help of the CDUCE, Free Europe, and other international partners.\textsuperscript{104} This hedging of their bets led to a progressive softening of their anticommunism, to the point where multiple SP activists openly traveled to Communist Poland in the 1970s and even negotiated on SP’s behalf with Communist politicians.\textsuperscript{105}

In the meantime, Polish Christian Democrats publicly and consistently supported Poland’s new postwar borders and demographics. No statements were

\textsuperscript{102} “Oświadczenie,” \textit{Tygodnik Powszechny}, 2/30 (1946), 3; Jan Piwowarczyk to Jerzy Turowicz, 10 July 1946, Piwowarczyk Correspondence, Archiwum Jerzego Turowicza, Goszyce.


\textsuperscript{104} “[T]o this end should be used the study trips organized by our partner organizations and fraternal Christian Democratic parties.” Stanisław Gebhardt, “Sprawozdanie o sytuacji na emigracji przedstawione na Radzie SP na Wychodźstwie,” 18–19 Nov. 1956, Box 9.10, Karol Popiel Papers, Archives of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America, APIASA, New York.

made on the “Jewish question” or the Holocaust, but SP activists’ continuity with the language of “masters in their own home” (1937) and “nationally homogeneous state” (1946) was preserved. In the end, the postwar exiles seemed to accept that World War II had, as Braun had suggested in 1945, realized interwar goals, displacing the Sanacja and reclaiming Poland for Catholics. Poland’s Stalinization forced them into exile, but Stalinism in Poland lasted only from 1948 to 1955. Thereafter, the Polish Christian Democrats could imagine for themselves a role even in a Soviet-aligned “People’s Poland,” so long as that Poland provided space for Poles to be “masters in their own home.”

In the 1960s, Catholic rights-talk returned to Poland, but not by the hand of Christian Democrats. Rather, it surfaced in the writings of young, engaged intellectuals—both Catholic and Communist—who had become disillusioned with Stalinism. These young men and women, on the eve of the Second Vatican Council, turned to rights-talk in parallel with the universal Catholic Church’s embrace of dialogue, ecumenism, freedom of conscience, and Judaism. Several generations’ worth of former “Catholic socialists”—the eldest of whom had encountered personalism and natural law as staff writers for Dziś i Jutro— and revisionist Marxists opened the door in the 1970s to Polish–German reconciliation, the embrace of the Helsinki Final Act, and the creation of the Workers’ Defense Committee (1976) and Solidarity (1980). When iconic secular-left dissident Adam Michnik published Kościół, lewica, dialog in 1977, the same year in which leading Catholic intellectual (and future Solidarity prime minister) Tadeusz Mazowiecki organized a conference called Christians on Human Rights, Christian Democracy was nowhere to be found. En route to becoming Pope John Paul II in 1978, Rev. Karol Wojtyła, too, moved beyond the exclusionary Imago Dei model of the Catholic Church, developing his own universalist personalism. This was the beginning of an antinationalist, universalist rights-talk that ultimately facilitated Poland’s negotiated exit from communism in 1989.

106 Kosicki, “The Soviet Bloc’s Answer.”