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Masculinity – Christianity – Patriotism (Based on the Example of Catholic Intermedia Messages)

Męskość – chrześcijaństwo – patriotyzm (na przykładzie katolickich przekazów intermedialnych)

Słowa kluczowe: męskość, chrześcijaństwo, patriotyzm, publicystyka katolicka

Key words: masculinity, Christianity, patriotism, Catholic journalism

The categories mentioned in the title of this paper are to indicate a certain interpretative lead which may become useful in the description of changes occurring in our domestic Christianity, appropriating not only journalism, but also the dimension of intermedia activities carried out by representatives of Catholic groups and associations, referring to masculinity as the basic category of defining and self-understanding. In order to illustrate the issue to be addressed here, I will refer to the example revealing and an interesting intertwining of meanings. One of web portals presents the following text:

Jeszcze 100 lat temu ułańska fantazja, szarmanckość i rycerski etos polskich kawalerzystów sprawiały, że panny na ulicy mdlały na widok jeźdźców w służbie Rzeczypospolitej. To było niecały wiek temu! Cóż się stało, że dziś, przechadzając się ulicą, czasami nie sposób rozpoznać kto przed nami stoi – dama, czy dżentelmen? Mamy dokładnie to, na cośmy zasłużyli – odrzuciliśmy i zapomnieliśmy, czym jest prawdziwe męstwo. Natura nie znosi próżni, a pustą przestrzeń naszych serc i umysłów zajęła intelektualna papka genderyzmu. Kluczowym zdaje się więc przywrócić to, co zostało utracone – męskość.

[Still 100 years ago, the bravado, gallantry and knightly ethos of Polish cavalrymen made the girls on the street faint seeing the riders in the service of the Republic of Poland. That was less than a century ago! What happened that today, walking down the street, it is sometimes impossible to recognize who is standing in front of us – a lady or a gentleman? We have exactly what we deserve – we rejected and forgot what true bravery is. Nature hates a vacuum, and the empty space of our hearts and minds has been taken up by the intellectual pulp of gen-

derism. Therefore, it seems crucial to restore what has been lost – masculinity.] (<http://www.trojcadopary.pl/on-meskosc/> [accessed: 14.11.2018])¹

The basic images (phantasms) included in the quoted statement, which have permanently set a specific cultural pattern, or following Charles Taylor (2010), social *imaginary*,² were founded bringing together, mutually conditioned, notions of chivalry, service for the home country and manliness. Finally, the call for restitution of masculinity, its renewal under traditional division of roles, is accompanied by criticism, as a right-wing journalist would say, of the *gender* “ideology”, undermining and deconstructing commonly accepted norms and behaviours. The emerging phrase “genderism pulp” should be therefore understood as an echo of Polish disputes concerning genders, so deeply rooted in Catholic journalism³.

“The knightly ethos of Polish cavalrymen”, “bravado”, “service to the Republic of Poland” are the descriptions linked to the image of military masculinity (Szczepanik 2012: 473–495; 2017), which might have been lost, but which should be restored as fast as possible, to not only defend constantly endangered Polishness, but also to rebuild the world order. The call to defend both the homeland and Catholicism against constantly emerging enemies (in particular the symbolic other identified with Muslims) is linked to the promotion of the ideal of male Christianity during the crusades (as Tomasz Terlikowski claimed)⁴. This ideal is manifested

¹ Texts derived from Internet sources are quoted with original spelling and punctuation.

² The Canadian philosopher writes: “I speak of *imaginary* because [...] I’m talking about the way ordinary people ‘imagine’ their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms; it is carried in images, stories, and legends. But [...] theory is usually the possession of a small minority, whereas what is interesting is the social imaginary that it is shared by large groups of people [...], the social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy” (Taylor 2010: 37). Such a concept of *imaginary* as “largely unstructured” ideas (ibid: 39), which cannot be expressed in an academic narration, seems to be a convenient method to describe masculine Christianity and its links with promotion of patriotic attitudes.

³ I am not going to elaborate on this topic, since it goes beyond the much more modest range of analysis presented in this sketch. Nevertheless, it should be observed that this thread would require a reflection on the levels of conceptualisation at which the *gender* discussion is taking place. I want to add that the opinions on the Catholic side are expressed not only by church hierarchs, professional theologians, but also armies and hosts of all kinds of publicists or representatives of the political right-wing. What should be emphasized, it is often difficult to find honesty and intellectual reliability in the texts, lectures and statements produced.

⁴ See an example of a political commentary text, with typical features of right-wing rhetoric: “It is not possible, as recent decades have showed, to introduce liberal democracy, rejection of rules, deprivation of morality and religiousness accepting at the same time foreign culture. As Koneczny wrote, civilisations must fight each other. If the West rejects God and solidarity, replacing it with disorder, aggressive secularisation, egoism and anarchy, then this place must be taken by something else. Islam has noticed this gap and is effectively attacking it. Fortunately, it can be replaced very fast. Something that used to be strong and highly effective in Europe: Christianity. The above mentioned [...] Terlikowski is right: Europe can be saved only by returning to definite and masculine Christianity. Without letting the false prophets deceive us [...]. The crusades were good, as their aim

not only at the level of discourse, but also in specific religious practices, aimed at opposing smooth modernity, softened ethical principles or Christian doctrine (which is the responsibility of an internal enemy, usually in the form of western academic theology, accused of challenging catechism's truths). Masculine Christianity in the Polish version would therefore be an attempt to reconstruct a specific notional community, based on clear axiology and identity formula, which would fit into a broader social context related to "retrotopic" look towards the past as the safety principle and domestication of unknown future (Bauman 2018: 7–25).

This look into the past would first of all, be a return to traditional patriotism, known from all possible narratives, most broadly speaking, the Polish "theology of history". Secondly, it would be a response to the deconstruction of the man's dominant position by feminism, revealing ideological entanglements of what was treated as universal, natural (Bourdieu 2004: 16–19), and thirdly, a kind of withdrawal towards simple solutions to be found in well-known models of life and behaviour, patterns of thought, which based on common-sense cognitive schemas, would not be involved in wider academic discussions. The call for masculine Christianity should be also understood as a form of opposition to the feminist discourse, which has also become established in the Polish Catholic theology (see Adamiak 1997; 1999; Radzik 2015). And here is a fragment from the statement by Kajetan Rajski – the author of the book *Prawdziwy mężczyzna.... czyli kto?* [*A True Man... That Is Who?*]:

Mam wrażenie [...], iż kobiety nadały ton męskiemu przeżywaniu wiary. Doszło wręcz do pewnego zniewieścienia mężczyzn w sprawach duchowych. Niełatwo dzisiaj o sympatię dla krucjat, powstań antyrewolucyjnych (Wandea, Cristiada), czy też walki z bronią w rękę za Boga, ojczyznę i rodzinę. Pracę zniewieścienia religijnego mężczyzn dokonały również środki masowego przekazu, wtłaczające katolikom do głowy, że skoro chrześcijaństwo jest religią pokoju, to nigdy nie należy chwycić za miecz w obronie wartości, które są podstawą europejskiej *Christianitas*. Wszystko to w imię „miłości, pokoju i tolerancji”. Zauważany jest kryzys tożsamości męczyzny [...]. W środowiskach chrześcijańskich pokutuje również niepełny obraz Chrystusa. Przedstawia się Go jako czułego przyjaciela wybaczącego grzechy, uzdrawiającego chorych, nawołującego do opieki nad bliźnimi. Zapominamy jednak o Panu Jezusie, który wywracał stoły w świątyni jerozolimskiej, gdy oburzony był targowiskiem, które uczyniono w domu Jego Ojca i który mówił, że przyszedł przynieść na ziemię miecz, a nie pokój.

was to defend our civilisation. We know that we can win in the long term. However, we must reject this entire moral decay created in the West and restore Latin civilisation" (Cwikła online). The fragments from this text trigger images of the Catholic Church known from the history, on one hand as a besieged fortress, and on the other, as a society able to introduce law and order in Europe, based on the medieval idea of *christianitas*. The reference to Felix Koneczny, whose texts are often mentioned by Polish conservatives, is not a coincidence here.

[I have an impression that [...] women have set the tone for the male experience of faith. We can observe even a certain effeminacy of men in spiritual matters. It is not easy today to find sympathy for the crusades, anti-revolutionary uprisings (Wandea, Cristiada), or armed struggle for God, homeland and family. Religious effeminacy of men is also the effect of mass media, cramming Catholics' heads with the message that since Christianity is a religion of peace, you should never hold a sword in defence of values underlying European *Christianitas*. And all of this in the name of "love, peace and tolerance". A crisis of male identity has been observed [...]. Additionally, an incomplete image of Christ is persisting among Christian communities. He is presented as a kind friend forgiving sins, healing the sick, calling for the care of our neighbours. However, we forget about Jesus who turned over tables in the Jerusalem temple, outraged by the marketplace organised in the house of His Father, and who used to say that he came not to send peace on earth but a sword.] (<http://lubimyczytac.pl/ksiazka/193144/prawdziwymezczyzna-czyli-kto> [access: 14.11.2018])

It seems indispensable to quote a longer passage to illustrate perseverance of motifs constantly appearing in the project of masculine Christianity, based on the antithesis of the idea of fight and peaceful co-existence of various attitudes of languages describing the reality which, in Rajski's opinion, pose a threat to the sovereignty of Catholicism, thus destroying and weakening the national and European community.⁵ The author raises one more issue related to the crisis of masculinity and the image of Christ to guide the behaviour. This thread should be understood in a far broader ideological context, which is not only a matter of public discourse, but also a kind of particular orthopraxy⁶.

The project of masculine Christianity linked with the traditional model of patriotism is therefore based on forming Catholic communities. "St. Joseph's Men", "Hermit Men", "God's Men", "St. Paul's Brotherhood", "Knights of John Paul II", "Male Rosary Platoons", "Mary's Fighters, Only4men" community, and an association active in Poland since 2006 "The Knights of the Columbus" (established in 1881) – are only some examples of active Catholic associations. The reader who is (un)familiar with the Christian world of imaginaries and phantasms can be surprised by the very sound of the above mentioned names, perhaps not only because of their inventiveness (names of brotherhoods established in Baroque were much

⁵ In the interview given for the Fronda portal, Rajski says "This crisis (of masculinity – I. Sz.) is inherently linked with the attacks of the enemies of the Church on the institution of marriage and family. After the protestant, democratic and communist revolutions, time has come for the moral revolution. People who are interested in breakdowns of families, want to attack first of all their heads, i.e. men. Promoting the immoral lifestyle, introducing disastrous gender ideology, finally, encouragement of irresponsibility – are all elements of the fight with traditional values" (*W Kościele panuje niemeński duch* online).

⁶ Deconstructing of a religious symbolic order, having its source in entangling the language of the Bible into androcentric way of speaking and imagining, make a constant topic in feminist theology or even Christology (Skladanowski 2013: 65–80).

more surprising), but because of their meaning, referring to the issues discussed in this paper, associated both with promoting a traditional religious or patriotic pattern and with the masculinity crisis, described or diagnosed in various ways by an army of sociologists, pedagogues and popular culture researchers (Melosik 2002; Skoczylas 2014: 200–219).

The idea of resurrecting masculinity and giving it a decisive status in terms of patriotic attitude can be understood as a response to liberal political and moral strategies or all kinds of *gender studies* research. In this context, it is worth recalling examples of books popular in male Catholic communities: *Wild at Heart. Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul* by John Eldredge (2003), *Why Men Hate Going to Church* by David Murrow (2007) and *Tender Warrior* by Stu Weber (2007)⁷. Generally speaking, the threads contained in these books are symptomatic of pre-critical approaches to masculinity focusing on military rhetoric. For example, *Wild at Heart* reads: “A man must have a battle to fight, a great mission to his life that involves and yet transcends even home and family. He must have a cause to which he is devoted even unto death, for this is written into the fabric of his being” (Eldredge 2003: 114). This thread, modified in many ways, returns in the statements (relations, reports, short interviews) of the male community representatives. Seeing masculinity in the categories of fight becomes a remedy for the crisis of religion and patriotic attitudes in the postmodern world. Here are two symptomatic claims expressed by the member of the “God’s Men” group: “They are trying to hide the truth about the man [...]. Today, we are being told that the man should be gentle, even effeminate. The media give us an image of the man – a pretty-boy with make-up, whose only desire is to shine in the flashlight”. The second one is this: “We are living in times when a bearded woman wins a popular music festival, and our country is represented by a man who looks and behaves as a woman [...]. And this is the image of the man provided to our children. Therefore, without the movement showing that the man should be the man, what is the future for us?” (<https://elblag.gosc.pl> [access: 14.11.2018]). Obviously, we deal here with emotional judgements, which are not subtle diagnoses of the present time. However, they postulate a return to clear understanding and defining rules, failing to recognize the multidimensionality and complexity of social practices. In fact, the second opinion shows a desire to reconstruct a definitely heterosexual masculinity as opposed to homosexuality. What is also characteristic is the expression of anxiety concerning the future. The unknown needs to be contrasted with the past – based on traditional forms of understanding what is masculine and feminine.

Masculine Christianity seems to be a recurrence of the cult of military masculinity or the fighter-patriot, known from the history of Poland (see more in Tomasik 2013). The adaptation of the New Testament image of *miles Christi* (see Ephesians

⁷ See also the previous work: Bly (1993).

6:10-20), which was primarily developed in *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola and his disciples (Piotr Skarga to be absolutely mentioned here⁸), became its ideological foundation. The idea of spiritual war (*pugna spiritualis*) emerging in Jesuit texts in the post-Tridentine period, in Counter-Reformation times, was used to both reorient an individual and to consolidate the Catholic community in the fight with internal and external enemies (see more in Lenart 2009). The Christian soldier idea was perfectly in line with the old Polish narration presenting Poland as the “antemurale”. As Tomasz Tomasik observes, “A prevailing manifestation of old Polish masculinity is the cult of manliness [...]. Ideal [...] old Polish man is a knight, a hero and a defender of Catholic faith, a participant in the ‘pious’ war” (Tomasik 2013: 85). This model therefore returns with Counter-Reformation religiousness (see Obirek 2015: 118–138) in the activity of Catholic communities describing their members as soldiers who constitute a well-organised and hierarchical army, divided into, e.g. platoons, companies, knightly ranks, squadrons, commanderies, in which they can hold the function of a delegate, treasurer, custodian, chancellor, etc.⁹ The social group structured in this way accepts the principle of faithfulness and obedience not only to one’s superiors, but also, as it is constantly repeated in the statutes of the associations, to the Catholic Church.

One of the elements of the Counter-Reformation attitude is the cult of Mary, highly popular in male associations, the indispensable element of which is to perceive Jasna Góra as the centre of Polishness, a symbolic mainstay of patriotism. This attitude is manifested, first of all, in worshiping the Blessed Virgin Mary as her servant, slave or knight. Therefore, today we deal with a continuation of the religious model, so strongly developing in particular in the 17th century. Accordingly, Mary’s Fighters (it is also the name of one Catholic group) participate in the eternal struggle between good and evil, understood in various ways, according to the projection of the threat as the other who can break social, ecclesiastical and national bonds. This motif, which actually does not need any excessive interpre-

⁸ Here it is worth mentioning The Rev. Piotr Skarga Association of Christian Culture operating in Poland. Choosing this most famous Polish Jesuit as the saint patron was a deliberate decision, related to the established image of the author of *Lives of the Saints* as a zealous patriot, fighting the Reformation and opponents of his homeland. The aim of the Association is therefore “to cultivate Christian values and traditions of the Polish nation, promote and protect cultural heritage of Christian civilisation, as well as to defend Christian values and moral principles in social and cultural life. Consequently, in addition to promoting the fundamental values for our civilisation, related to tradition, family and ownership, we often defend them in our work. We try to achieve it through social, educational, cultural, charity and educational activities. As Catholic laypersons, we carry out our activity based on the doctrine of the Holy Catholic Church and have no relationship with other religions” (<https://www.piotrskarga.pl/nasz-patron,10142,1.html> [access: 14.11.2018]). The issue of Piotra Skarga and his image in religious memory has been examined, among others, by Krzysztof Obremski (2015: 72–87).

⁹ See e.g. <http://lewjudy.info/meskieplutonyrozanca/>; <http://rycerzejp2.com.pl/dokumenty/regula>; <http://www.rycerzekolumba.com/ftp/materialy/przewodnik-wielkiego-rycerza.pdf> [access: 14.11.2018].

tation strategies, is characteristic not only for journalistic texts, but also for the intermedia activity of religious associations¹⁰.

On the websites of Catholic communities, it is easy to find the call to patriotism as an important aspect of the man's behaviour and action. Apart from the stereotypical message about loving the homeland¹¹, the reader can find more elaborate statements, particularly visible in statutory documents of "the Knights of John Paul II" and "the Knights of Columbus". The former group lists, among others, taking care of the development of patriotism and promotion of the spirituality of men as the objectives of its existence and activity¹². Christian values, manliness and homeland make an inseparable interweaving of meanings, which is also expressed in insignia and symbols used by the members of the "Knights of John Paul II" community:

Zakon Rycerzy Jana Pawła II przyjmuje jako swój znak – stylizowany herb papieża Jana Pawła II – czarna tarcza herbowa z godłem w postaci złotego krzyża łacińskiego przesuniętego w lewo z wpisaną w prawym dolnym rogu złotą literą „M” oznaczająca Maryję, Matkę Bożą [...]. Różaniec jest swoistym mieczem Rycerza Jana Pawła II, który otrzymał przy powołaniu do Zakonu, i który winien mieć zawsze przy sobie. [...] Każdy z Braci, uczęszczając w uroczystościach kościelnych lub patriotycznych, powinien z dumą nosić swój rycerski strój i insignia pamiętając, że reprezentuje innych Rycerzy zgromadzonych pod zaszczytnym znakiem Papieża Jana Pawła II.

[The Order of the Knights of John Paul II accepts as its sign – a stylized coat of arms of the Pope John Paul II – a black crest with an emblem in the form of a gold Latin cross shifted to the left, with a gold letter "M" inscribed in the right bottom corner, standing for Mary, Mother of God [...]. The rosary is a specific sword of every Knight of John Paul II, received by him during his appointment to the Order, and which he should always have with him. [...] Each of the Brothers, participating in church or patriotic celebrations, should always proudly wear his knight outfit and insignia, having in mind that he is representing other Knights gathered under the honourable symbol of the Pole John Paul II.] (<http://rycerzejp2.com.pl/dokumenty/regula> [access: 14.11.2018])

The behaviour of confreres, as it can be easily observed, is accompanied by an expanded visual or gesture sphere, referring to the ceremony of accolade or rituals related to participation in religious services:

Przyjęcie nowego członka Zakonu odbywa się podczas Mszy Świętej odprawianej za zgodą proboszcza miejsca (danej chorągwi), kiedy to kandydat przystępuje do prezbiterium i klęcząc składa ślubowanie (mając otwarte trzy palce wyciągniętej

¹⁰ See e.g. Szczuka (online), Czerniecki (online).

¹¹ See e.g. <http://lewjudy.info/modlitwa-w-intencji-ojczyzny/#more-6582> [access: 14.11.2018].

¹² See <http://rycerzejp2.com.pl/dokumenty/regula> [access: 14.11.2018].

prawej ręki) na wierność Bogu, Papieżowi i Ojczyźnie [...]. Bracia Rycerze winni siedzieć skupieni wokół Krucyfiksu i flagi państwowej.

[A new member of the Order is admitted during the Holy Mass celebrated with the consent of the local parish priest (of the place corresponding to a specific squadron), when the candidate joins the presbytery, and takes the oath kneeling down (with outstretched three fingers of the raised right hand) of allegiance to God, Pope and Homeland [...]. The Knight Brothers should be sitting around the Crucifix and the national flag.] (<http://rycerzejp2.com.pl/dokumenty/regula> [access: 14.11.2018])

It should be noted that the reference to the knightly ethos inherently underlies identification of the religious sphere with the secular one, symbolises the return to the eternal *ordo*, which is also reflected in the vision of the homeland history from the sacred perspective.

The diverse activities of Catholic communities are also manifested in the publication of short guides – “The Knights of Columbus” publish a newsletter under a telling title “Zbroja” [“Armour”].¹³ The symbolism explored by the brotherhood members can be easily interpreted. From the perspective of an individual, it is strongly linked to masculinity, consisting in self-control, separation from what could break the external armour, stability of the subject, while from the community perspective it concerns defence of the homeland against threats. One of the newsletters says:

Dlaczego cenię sobie to, że jestem Rycerzem? Po pierwsze, Zakon Rycerzy Kolumba to świat wartości mi bliskich. Wierność Kościołowi; twarde opowiadanie się za autorytetem papieża, [...] patriotyzm; pomoc drugiemu człowiekowi, [...]. Dla Rycerzy są one programem – zadaniem do wykonania. [...] Pielęgnowanie patriotyzmu, troska o wolny byt Ojczyzny – na taką miarę, na jaką jest nam dane – to również ważne zadanie Rycerzy. Zwłaszcza dziś, kiedy – może po raz pierwszy od 25 lat – pojawiły się tak duże zagrożenia z zewnątrz.

[Why do I appreciate being a Knight? First of all, the Order of the Knights of Columbus is the world of the values that are close to me. The fidelity to the Church, strong commitment to the Pope’s authority, [...] patriotism, helping other people, [...]. For the Knights, these are the programme – task to be accomplished. [...] Fostering patriotism, taking care for the free Homeland – to the extent available to us – is also an important task of the Knights. Particularly today, when – perhaps for the first time in 25 years – such serious external threats have emerged.] (http://www.rycerzekolumba.com/polska/ftp/zbroja/Zbroja-nr_018.pdf [access: 14.11.2018])

¹³ The newsletters are available at: <http://www.rycerzekolumba.com/polska/index.php/inne/zbroja-biuletyn-rady-stanowej.html> [access: 14.11.2018].

The motif of danger, mentioned at the beginning of this sketch, can be observed once again. This motif will also appear in another issue of “Zbroja” and will be combined with an idea of a battle for the Latin civilisation (perceived as *christianitas*), and the battlefield for its preservation will be obviously in Poland¹⁴.

Recapitulation

This sketch is only an attempt to examine the project of masculine Christianity emerging in Poland, which seems to be coming increasingly often to the fore in the media space. I tried to capture in the text some important aspects of this form of religiousness, referring, obviously, only to some examples of journalistic statements, newsletters, books or founding rules of the above discussed Catholic associations.

The Internet sources used in the paper would certainly require much more detailed examination, but in view of the repetitiveness of the motifs, I tried to demonstrate characteristic and at the same time common features, shared by specific forms of journalism, which in the Internet space is often based on the power of persuasion and does not include the dimension of in-depth analyses. It should also be added that the authorship status of the journalism statements seems unclear, as they undergo numerous appropriations and modifications. Finally, they constitute a text material used for promoting traditional patriotism and Christianity, which in the right-wing discourse is understood as a remedy for a (post)modern, let us add – pluralistic and multicultural – society¹⁵.

Masculine Christianity combined with patriotism in the Polish version seems to be an interesting proof of changes occurring at the point of contact of culture and religion, discourse and social practices. The disturbed liberal order is linked to nostalgia for the world put in the right order and for taking social roles traditionally identified as male or female. Postulated patriotism, founded on sustaining, imitating, almost copying the cultural pattern from the Counter-Reformation period, is based on the notional unity of the nation, bound together with Catholicism. On the other hand, in the discursive dimension it seems to be a retreat or even a flight from the complicated world of ideas towards clear senses, usually set up by journalistic texts, excluding a sound reflection on the emerging cultural changes.

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¹⁴ See e.g. http://www.rycerzekolumbia.com/polska/ftp/zbroja/Zbroja-nr_056.pdf [access: 14.11.2018].

¹⁵ This thread would require additional comments which would significantly exceed the boundaries of a sketch devoted to masculine Christianity. At this point it is worth referring to the work by Stanisław Obirek (2011) investigating the Catholic struggle with (post)modernism models of interpretation and understanding of religion in the modern world.

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Summary

This article examines the project of male Christianity, which seems to be of increasing importance. The text aims to show some important aspects of this form of religiosity, referring to the example of journalistic statements, bulletins, books and rules that provide the basis of the functioning of Catholic associations.

Male Christianity combined with patriotism seems to be an interesting testimony of the changes taking place at the meeting point of culture and religion. It primarily consists in reproducing the pattern of cultural counter-reformation days, based on the imaginary unity of the nation, which is cemented by Catholicism.

