Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland by Brian Porter-Szűcs (review)

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localized damage, but to claim that "much of the grazing land was once again destroyed, and the livestock died" [p. 50] is an overstatement; sheep were not brought to Iceland from the British Isles in the mid eighteenth century to repair the damage caused by the sheep scab plague of the 1760s [p. 69]—on the contrary, imported rams caused the plague; the statement that "building of highways and airports, only came with postwar foreign imports" [p. 102] is nonsensical; Tórshavn is not the smallest capital city in the world [p. 124]; Yann Gaos, the protagonist in Pierre Loti's novel *Pêcheur d'Islande* was not an Icelandic hero but a Breton fisherman [p. 130]; the letter ø is not a part of the Icelandic vowel set [p. 143]; the Act of Union between Denmark and Iceland did not expire in 1944 [pp. 13 and 149], rather Iceland abrogated the treaty.) My qualms with the book concern more what I see as Oslund's "Borealist" approach. Questions like "Where and what is Iceland? Is it part of 'Europe' or a technologically advanced and prosperous part of the 'third world'?" (pp. 6–7) frame her narrative, as they are posed in the introduction and repeated in a different guise in the epilogue (p. 169). The answers to these questions can only be, of course, based on subjective choices, because categories like "European" and "the third world" are human conventions rather than facts of life. Similar to "race" or "nations," analytical categories of this sort can serve as the basis for people's self-identification, but sometimes they are thrust on groups not to formulate their own knowledge of themselves but rather to explain the classifiers' own perceptions or prejudices. The Borealist discourses studied in *Iceland Imagined* are of the latter type; that is, the upper- and middle-class observers were not interested in how the Icelanders themselves perceived the world, because they came to experience the "exotic," and on the basis of that they constructed Iceland as the "other." Too often, *Imagining Iceland* sounds remarkably similar, and thus it reads not as a critical deconstruction of the Borealism of the past, but rather as a modern contribution to it.

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Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland. By BRIAN PORTER-SZŰCS. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 496 pp. $55.00 (cloth).

With the exception of Italy, perhaps no other nation-state is more closely connected with Roman Catholicism today than Poland, and

with reason: 98 percent of all children born there are baptized into the faith and at least 90 percent of all adult Poles self-identify as Catholic (p. 4). The late Pope John Paul II, as is well known, hailed from Poland, where he served as archbishop of Cracow before taking upon the leadership of the entire Church in 1978. And yet the association of "Pole" with "Catholic" is not limited merely to these largely unassailable facts; rather, as Brian Porter-Szűcs points out in his masterful study *Faith and Fatherland,* "it is supported by a deeply ingrained but highly selective telling of national history," a history that makes it difficult to account for the religious diversity of the former incarnations of the Polish state (including before World War II, when only two-thirds of the population was Catholic), to acknowledge the Protestant Reformation there, or to admit that clergy began to connect faith and fatherland only at the beginning of the twentieth century (p. 5).

If Church leaders have sought to remove the Church and the nation from historical time, asserting the constancy (and hegemony) of Polish Catholicism, Porter-Szűcs methodically and emphatically reinserts the specificity and exigency of history back into the narrative, showing how the contours of Polish Catholic thought on matters such as sin, modernity, the nation, the Jews, and the Virgin Mary have morphed over the last two centuries. As he observes, "Profound transformations often involve a seemingly subtle shift in the bounds of the permissible, a normalization of what had been unspeakable or a quiet repudiation of what was once commonplace" (p. 141). This book offers an excellent example of the power of intellectual history to explicate the complex and shifting relationship between two worldviews, the Catholic and the national, while problematizing their simple conflation.

In ten chapters Porter-Szűcs explores key themes in Polish Catholic rhetoric as its adherents struggled to make Catholicism modern. The overarching theme, unsurprisingly, is the encroachment of nationalism into Catholic thought, manifest most importantly and disturbingly in a worldview that blamed Masons, Jews, and Bolsheviks for the perceived challenges of modernity to faith and family. Porter-Szűcs notes the logical inconsistency of a doctrine premised upon love for one's neighbors combined with the hatred of national exclusivity and anti-Semitism—a subject he explored from the secular side in his first book, *When Nationalism Began to Hate* (Oxford University Press, 2001)—while showing precisely how such configurations came about. Each chapter—"The Church," "Sin," "Modernity," "The Person and Society," "Politics," "The Nation Penitent," *"Ecclesia Militans,"* "The Jew," "Polak-Katolik," and "Mary, Militant and Maternal"—begins

with nineteenth- or early twentieth-century discourse among Polish Catholic clergy on the given topic, before following its development to the present. Deeply knowledgeable about Catholic theology, both within Poland and in its larger global context, and highly sensitive to the semantics of key Polish words and phrases, Porter-Szűcs offers trenchant analysis of sermons, clerical debates, and public discussions published in sources ranging from official encyclicals to secret police records or Internet chatroom posts.

Overall, one notes a shift in Polish Catholic thought from emphasis on personal sin to national righteousness, from injunctions to "love thy neighbor" to exclusivist and anti-Semitic vitriol, from acceptance of hierarchical social and political arrangements to support for democracy and human rights. The chapters that focus more on the 1970s and 1980s (when the Catholic Church was at its apogee in Poland) reveal greater emphasis on love and the worth of the individual, which incidentally could be used as a weapon against the Communist authorities, while the conclusion reveals a duality or even plurality in Polish Catholic thought today, ranging from a vocal minority's contemporary reformulation of the anti-Semitic, antimodern conspiracy theories of the interwar period to more liberal and universalist attitudes among some clergy and parishioners, whose attendance at mass has dropped to 40 percent and whose attitudes toward capital punishment, abortion, premarital sex, and civil unions for homosexuals frequently don't square with the official teachings of the Catholic Church (pp. 9–12). Ultimately, Porter-Szűcs cautions us against making any generalizing claims about Polish Catholicism, or any ideological formation, for that matter, as an object unto itself. There are "definite boundaries surrounding Polish Catholicism," he asserts, but much room for maneuver within those boundaries (p. 395).

Faith and Fatherland is above all an intellectual history, but Porter-Szűcs is particularly thoughtful about the relationship between ideas and practice, where they differ and where they reinforce each other. His discussion of interwar anti-Semitism, for example, carefully addresses the "mutually constitutive" relationship between social realities and ideology (p. 291). Citing the relevant statistics, he demonstrates that while most Jews were poor, Jews also tended to predominate in a few white-collar professions. Even if there was competition between Poles and Jews for resources and positions, interwar anti-Semitism "was much, much more than just an emanation from economic or cultural tensions between two communities" (p. 290). Both factors mattered, he writes, but the ideological framework was ultimately more important: "Although some elements of the anti-Semitic worldview were

undoubtedly related to lived experiences, those experiences were given meaning within a larger conspiratorial vision, and all differences of experience from place to place were washed away by an ideology that projected Jewish homogeneity" (p. 293). Modern anti-Semitism took longer to take root in the countryside, where Polish Catholics and Polish Jews actually knew each other personally, but eventually even there the conspiracy theory of global Jewish domination began to hold sway (p. 293). Ideology could also predispose individuals to notice only those communist leaders of Jewish extraction, in creating a myth of *Żydo-komuna* (Jewish Communism), while "conversely, the majority of communists or socialists who were not Jewish escaped attention, much as our eyes often fail to perceive that which we do not expect to see" (p. 299).

Throughout, the author breaks from the narrative to make observations about discourse analysis (p. 257), the fallacy of "describing an example of political mobilization or conflict as 'religious'" (p. 167), or the nature of "political correctness" as a mechanism that determines the bounds of an ideology or identity (p. 396). The result is a book that encourages its readers to think about the relationship between ideology and behavior, religion and politics, and change over time. One sees how flexible religious thought can be: so long as its adherents can keep within the bounds of a few core tenets, there is great room for shifts in emphasis or accommodation of seemingly incompatible elements. That said, this reader is still unsure about the relationship between Polish Catholicism as a belief system and the Polish Catholic Church as an institution for Porter-Szűcs. His book is clearly a history of the former and not the latter, and while it seems clear that he would resist seeing the Church as monolithic, as a hierarchical institution, it has ways of privileging certain ideas or practices over others. Does a study of Polish Catholicism as such protect or prevent one from passing judgment on the Church as an institution?

Porter-Szűcs, who is professor of history at the University of Michigan and president of the Polish Studies Association, has written a major book about a truly significant topic. While its relevance is most directly applicable to Polish studies or histories of Roman Catholicism, the book would be useful for scholars of other world religions, political movements, and religiously motivated groups. Porter-Szűcs's insistence "that every large *ism* is a vehicle for thought and action, but never a cause" compels us to think and write with greater precision about ideological formations, from Polish Catholicism to so-called Islamic terrorism (p. 394). Cognizant that the outworn secularization narrative of modernity has failed to account for the abundant evidence of modern

religious thought, identification, and practice, we should welcome such insightful, thorough, and compelling studies of religion (and nationalism) as *Faith and Fatherland*.

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Taming Cannibals: Race and the Victorians. By PATRICK BRANTLINGER. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011. 288 pp. $45.00 (cloth).

Taming Cannibals is the third of a trilogy of monographs addressing the relationship between race and imperialism by Patrick Brantlinger. Using historical case studies and literary analysis tied together by the "savage cannibal" trope, he emphasizes the contradictions of racism. According to Brantlinger, historians, especially prior to the advent of postcolonialism, tend to downplay the pervasiveness of racism in nineteenth-century Britain and its function as the intellectual foundation of imperial expansion. He argues that even the seemingly more innocuous forms of imperialism like the desire to help others through humanitarian work were also "underwritten" by racism (p. 9). The Victorian desire to tame cannibals (i.e., bring civilization to "savages") cannot be separated from racism. Rather than a character flaw revealed in individuals, Brantlinger sees racism as part of the warp and woof of society itself. Thus, Brantlinger criticizes Homi Bhabba for making stereotyping a function of individual psyches and not instead recognizing it as a constituent element of British social structure. Moreover, Brantlinger claims that in practice Bhabba treats the colonizer-colonized relationship as a static binary, thereby ignoring its hybridity (p. 17).

Brantlinger's eight chapters demonstrate the importance of race to the Victorian worldview. The first two chapters examine two attempts to "civilize" supposedly cannibalistic savages. Civilizing efforts on Fiji were a success. Missionaries converted Thakombau, whose people then abandoned their cannibalism and sought to become a British colony in 1858. The second case, that of George Robinson's attempt to save the Tasmanian Aborigines from extinction by aggressively assimilating them into European culture, was a failure. Brantlinger argues that modern historians can only whitewash the destruction of the Tasmanian Aborigines if they discredit Robinson's ethnographic accounts, which is exactly what historians like Keith Windschuttle have done (p. 47). Brantlinger finds a common thread of racism among both groups of