


RESEARCH ARTICLE

Brokering Right-to-Life: Poland and the Transnational Entanglements of Catholic Pro-Life Activism, from Santiago to Washington to Gdańsk, 1970s–1990s

Piotr H. Kosicki and Sylwia Kuźma-Markowska 

University of Maryland, College Park, MD, USA and University of Warsaw, Warsaw, PL

Corresponding author: Sylwia Kuźma-Markowska; Email: s.kuzma@uw.edu.pl

Abstract

This article examines multi-vector pro-life exchanges between Poland and two American countries: the United States and Chile. We make the case that the 1970s through 1990s represent a significant historical moment that yielded both transplantable templates and direct longitudinal consequences for transnational social activism in the twenty-first century. We argue that during this time Poland acted as an incubation site for pro-life transnationalism, where “right to life” became the rallying cry of new generations of Catholic Far Right thinkers and activists like the politician Marek Jurek and journalists and social activists Ewa Kowalewska and Lech Kowalewski. The transnational entanglements that empowered Jurek, Kowalewska, and Kowalewski assumed intellectual and political forms, while also producing direct contact and active exchange of tactics, ideas, and know-how with the leaders of the U.S. pro-life movement such as John Willke or Father Paul Marx. Our study, situated at the intersection of intellectual history and social movement studies, highlights the importance of examining transnationalism with full attention to its local rootedness, and makes a case for incorporating non-progressive social activism into the post-1989 story of civic and social mobilization.

Keywords: transnational history; intellectual history; transnational social activism; pro-life mobilization; anti-abortion activism; reproductive rights; Catholic Church; Far Right; Christian Democracy

Introduction

In fall 2020, Poland’s Constitutional Tribunal—co-opted and vassalized by the country’s right-wing Law and Justice government—handed down a decision effectively banning abortion, already severely restricted since 1993. The result was a mass mobilization of over 100,000 women. The “Women’s Strike” captured the

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imaginations of pro-democracy and women's rights activists worldwide.¹ Yet as Poles of both genders protested, a former Speaker of the lower house of Poland's Parliament looked on in horror: sitting down to pen what became a two hundred-page screed, Marek Jurek railed against "attacks on churches" and the "opportunism" of the governing Right.² Jurek—a far-right figure out of principle, not out of populism—contended that the right-populist government had failed to provide adequate protections for the right to life, that it should never have allowed mass protests, and that abortion would surely return given what Jurek considered the lack of a decisive solution.³

The twenty-first century has witnessed the mainstreaming of right-wing populism in Poland, but experts' excessive focus on Law and Justice's leader Jarosław Kaczyński masks the persistence of a principled fringe whose pro-life commitments have, since the 1970s, helped to forge a sphere of "transnational nationalism" in which Catholic pro-lifers from Poland have emulated, exchanged, and forged partnerships with the Western Hemisphere (South and North).⁴ In this article, we draw on a mix of intellectual history and social-movement analysis to track two separate types of Polish pro-life activists. On the one hand, intellectual intermediaries like Jurek served as conduits for norms and concepts—from the European past and from the Latin American present. On the other, grassroots social activists like Ewa Kowalewska and Lech Kowalewski—a Catholic couple from the seaside city of Gdańsk, both a cradle of the anti-communist opposition and the home of Poland's Solidarity movement—became proxies for U.S.-based pro-life advocates, brokering direct transfers of materials, funds, and personnel to Poland's emerging national pro-life network.

The common denominator for this Catholic (trans)national activism was organizational: all three of our protagonists cut their teeth with the Young Poland Movement (Ruch Młodej Polski, RMP).⁵ Founded in 1979, RMP followed on the heels of Eastern Europe's "Helsinki moment" (Committee for the Defense of Workers, Charter 77, etc.) mobilizing anti-communist, nationalist students in a Poland-wide network of discussion circles and samizdat publications. Some participants were deeply religious, others not at all, but all identified with a conservative vision of the Polish nation.⁶ What ultimately yielded a Polish process

¹See, for example, Agnieszka Graff, "What Happens When You Lose Abortion Rights and How to Win Them Back: 6 Lessons from Poland," *Balkan Insight*, 10 Aug. 2022.

²Marek Jurek, *100 godzin samotności albo rewolucja październikowa nad Wisłą* (Dębogóra: Dębogóra, 2021).

³At: <https://teologiapolityczna.pl/marek-jurek-skutki-narodowego-wyparcia>, 17 Dec. 2020 (accessed 20 Aug. 2025). On the "national populism" of the Polish Right, see esp. Jarosław Kuisz, *The New Politics of Poland: A Case of Post-Traumatic Sovereignty* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023).

⁴See, for example, Agnieszka Pasięka, "Transnational Nationalists: Far-Right Encounters in Contemporary Europe," *Ethnologia Europaea* 54, 2 (2024): 64–89.

⁵With full awareness of scholarly discussions regarding the terminology used to refer to movements seeking the criminalization of abortion, in this article we use interchangeably "anti-abortion" and the emic terms "pro-life" and "right-to-life."

⁶Tomasz Sikorski, *O kształt polityki polskiej: Oblicze ideowo-polityczne i działalność Ruchu Młodej Polski (1979-1989)* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2012); Tom Junes, *Student Politics in Communist Poland: Generations of Consent and Dissent* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 176–91. On the "Helsinki moment" in Poland, see Robert Brier, *Poland's Solidarity Movement and the Global Politics of Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 39–90.

of “transnationalization of collective action” began as a generational protest in the 1970s and 1980s by right-wing activists from across Poland.

In a classic formulation, social movement theorists Sidney Tarrow and Doug McAdam once asked, “Under what conditions does contention grow beyond its localized beginnings to become a force for transnational change?”⁷ Marek Jurek became a prominent public figure in post-communist Poland, but he began his career as a dissident, an essayist and social activist, and co-founder of the RMP. Inspired among others by the example of Augusto Pinochet’s Chile, Jurek has spent decades in Polish public life advocating for a muscular executive authority that would restrain procedural democracy from making the pro-life stance a subject of serious contestation. In the early 1990s, Kowalewska and Kowalewski advocated pro-life stances in the RMP’s publications. The Young Poland Movement thus represents what W. Lance Bennet calls an “inclusive organizational model.”⁸

Our typology of the (trans)national social movement-building in which these activists engaged draws on, but also goes beyond, the canonical works of social movement theorists like Tarrow and McAdam, as well as pioneers of “global intellectual history” such as Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori. Jurek, through attentive observation of the West European past and the Latin American present, became a mediator anxious to reshape Eastern Europe in the Ibero-American image. His work helped to lay the conceptual foundations for the national and transnational mobilization of Polish Catholic pro-lifers in the 1990s and beyond. Examining intellectual intermediaries like Jurek is therefore a precondition to transnational social movement analysis, establishing “how individuals crossing seemingly insurmountable borders learned how to make intellectual cultures mutually intelligible.”⁹

Jurek and a handful of RMP colleagues harnessed the South-to-East appeal of Chile’s Catholic authoritarianism to reach young nationalists in Poland.¹⁰ Kowalewska and Kowalewski actively exchanged tactics, ideas, and know-how with leaders of the U.S. anti-abortion movement such as Father Paul Marx (labeled “Public Enemy #1” by Planned Parenthood) and organizations like Human Life International. In Tarrow and McAdam’s terms: Jurek’s analytical “diffusion” of concepts and models helped to make possible Kowalewska and Kowalewski’s activist “brokerage” (“the linking of two or more previously unconnected social sites”).¹¹

⁷Sidney Tarrow and Doug McAdam, “Scale Shift in Transnational Contention,” in Donatella Della Porta and Sidney Tarrow, eds., *Transnational Protest and Global Activism* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 121–50, 121.

⁸W. Lance Bennet, “Social Movements beyond Borders: Understanding Two Eras of Transnational Activism,” in Donatella Della Porta and Sidney Tarrow, eds., *Transnational Protest and Global Activism* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 203–26, 212.

⁹Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, “Approaches to Global Intellectual History,” in S. Moyn and A. Sartori, eds., *Global Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 3–32, 9.

¹⁰For the emerging canon on East-South interactions, see, for example, Małgorzata Mazurek, “Polish Economists in Nehru’s India: Making Science for the Third World in an Era of De-Stalinization and Decolonization,” *Slavic Review* 77, 3 (2018): 588–610; Chris Saunders, Helder Adegas Fonseca, and Lena Dallywater, eds., *Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and Africa: New Perspectives on the Era of Decolonization, 1950s to 1990s* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2023).

¹¹Tarrow and McAdam, “Scale Shift in Transnational Contention,” 127.

When speaking of a “Far Right” here we depart from a more traditional focus on nostalgic monarchists and neo-fascist football hooligans, instead zooming in on deeply pious Roman Catholics identifying with a global community of religious faith that has dictated the terms of their nationalist identifications.¹² The Catholic pro-life nationalism incubated by the RMP offers, however paradoxically, a heuristic model for making sense of the transnational entanglements of this article’s protagonists. These activists took advantage of communism’s definitive collapse at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s to enter fully into the global pro-life community on terms of co-authorship and agency. As anthropologist Agnieszka Pasięka has recently shown, the Far Right is not some unintelligible force from another planet. Neither “passive, dispossessed victims” nor “otherwise irrational actors,” these activists represent a continuum of “transnational nationalism” conditioned from the ground-up by engagement with ongoing structural shifts: generational, ideological, socioeconomic, and geopolitical.¹³ Pasięka’s work has treated this phenomenon extensively not just as a “scaling up” of national forces, but rather a forging of genuine global spaces of solidarity marked by “strong bonds, friendship, respect, and space for personal transformation.”¹⁴ This entails what Tarrow and McAdam call the “*transposition, not liquidation, of local and national movements*: The shift of scale does not automatically cancel out national and local social movements.”¹⁵

The pro-life activism born of the Young Poland Movement intersected with an era of ferment and contestation within Roman Catholicism writ large. Infamously, the Holy See’s prohibition not only on abortion, but on most forms of contraception, would be reiterated a mere three years after the Second Vatican Council’s closing, with the 1968 papal pronouncement known as *Humanae Vitae* (“On Human Life”). Morally speaking, Marek Jurek, Ewa Kowalewska, and Lech Kowalewski were among its children. Although this document introduced little in the way of new Church teaching, it fractured the global Catholic community, positioning advocates of women’s rights and public health against an emerging “right-to-life” network—and reifying the divide between Rome-loyal postcolonial populations and increasingly secularized ex-imperial metropolises.¹⁶

Papal encyclicals are typically collaborative efforts, and one of the key shadow voices behind *Humanae Vitae* was the Polish cardinal Karol Wojtyła, who only a decade later became Pope John Paul II.¹⁷ This is the pontiff who, in a 1979 audience, lauded Human Life International founder Paul Marx for doing “the most important work on earth.”¹⁸ The global Catholic doctrine underlying transnational pro-life activism was thus from the start inflected by a Polish accent.

¹²Rafał Pankowski, *The Populist Radical Right in Poland: The Patriots* (London: Routledge, 2010).

¹³Agnieszka Pasięka, *Living Right: Far-Right Youth Activists in Contemporary Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024), 5.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵Tarrow and McAdam, “Scale Shift in Transnational Contention,” 123 (their italics).

¹⁶Piotr H. Kosicki, “The Catholic 1968: Poland, Social Justice, and the Global Cold War,” *Slavic Review* 77, 3 (2018): 638–60. For a sampling of contemporary reactions: Leo Altig von Geusau, “International Reaction to the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*,” *Studies in Family Planning* 1, 50 (1970): 8–12.

¹⁷Michael J. Barberi and Joseph A. Selling, “The Origins of *Humanae Vitae* and the Impasse in Fundamental Theological Ethics,” *Louvain Studies* 37, 4 (2013): 364–89.

¹⁸“Father Paul Benno Marx OSB,” *Saint John’s Abbey*, <https://saintjohnsabbey.org/father-paul-benno-marx-osb> (accessed 11 Oct. 2024).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, “integralism” was the calling card of anti-republican, anti-Semitic, frequently royalist far-right forces across Europe, announcing an instrumental subordination (*politique, d’abord*—so intoned Action Française icon Charles Maurras) of religious faith to an organicist conception of the “integral” national body.¹⁹ A century later, Maurras and his Polish counterpart Roman Dmowski were reinterpreted by a new Polish Far Right, born in the final decades of the Cold War. The RMP offers a case study in how Catholic nationalism, rooted in a natalist, anti-abortion core, can scale up to transnational social and political contention. In this sense, the RMP’s transnational nationalism was “biologically” conservative but also radical in its vision of a far-right future.

Unlike the famously agnostic Maurras and Dmowski, Jurek, Kowalewska, and Kowalewski all put the religious foundations of national community front and center: biology followed from liturgy, humankind from God. As one of Jurek’s colleagues at the journal *Christianitas* intoned at the dawn of the twenty-first century, there was no shame in “integralism”: the Christian liturgy constituted a crucial foundation for the national community—heralding a state that, even if formally secular, had in fact been baptized. For this reason, liturgy—no longer just a matter of esoteric rituals in houses of worship—became in the final decades of the twentieth century a vehicle for the transnationally embedded Polish Far Right to excavate the foundations of religious actors’ engagement in public life: “If any community cultivating a liturgical tradition were to declare a false neutrality in matters of Christian engagement beyond the liturgy, this would, after all, mean a perverse transgression against the dynamism of eucharistic coherence and moral abnegation of the truth of the beloved liturgy.”²⁰ In other words, a community of faith—identified by its attachments, among others, to pre-Vatican II liturgical practice—came to celebrate 1968’s *Humanae Vitae* as a cornerstone not only for Catholic morality, but for any just secular political order.

So-called miracle years like 1968 are perhaps too easily exaggerated in global and transnational studies, but somewhere between the “global 1968” and the “global 1973”—the latter being the year of the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Roe v. Wade* judgment, Augusto Pinochet’s seizure of power in Chile, geopolitical realignment around the OPEC crisis, the Yom Kippur War, and the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam—we can chart the origins of a uniquely revealing, historically contingent form of transnational activism. We make the case in this article that the 1970s through 1990s represent a significant historical moment that yielded both transplantable templates and direct longitudinal consequences for transnational social activism in the twenty-first century.

Our focus on collaborations and exchanges with the United States and Chile on either side of the traditional caesura of communism’s collapse in Poland aims to expand and nuance the histories of transnational pro-life and pro-family movements that have so far been presented mostly as a unidirectional flow from the United States to Eastern Europe, tending to concentrate on the post-1989 period.²¹ By shifting the

¹⁹See, for example, Piotr H. Kosicki, *Catholics on the Barricades: Poland, France, and “Revolution,” 1891–1956* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 21–61.

²⁰Paweł Milcarek, “Integryzm i integralność,” *Christianitas* no. 39/2008 (<https://christianitas.org/news/integryzm-i-integralnosc>). Unless otherwise noted, translations from the Polish and the Spanish are the authors’ own.

²¹Kathryn Slattery, “Building a ‘World Coalition for Life’: Abortion, Population Control and Transnational Pro-Life Networks, 1960–1990” (PhD diss., University of New South Wales, 2010); Kristina

focus earlier, expanding the primary source base, and including in our analysis the Ibero-American inspiration drawn by Polish pro-life activists, we show the multi-vectored nature of pro-life exchanges between Poland and the Americas.

It was with John Paul II's 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* ("The Gospel of Life") that his oft-cited words about a "culture of death" came into mainstream parlance among Catholic politicians the world over.²² This new discursive convention empowered an emerging young global Catholic Right—especially in countries where John Paul II's in-person pilgrimages, as with his 1999 visit to Poland, reinforced his denunciation of a "culture" (variously, "civilization") of death.²³ But, to reverse the fabled formulation of the late Catholic sociologist Andrew Greeley, this was old wine poured into new wineskins.²⁴ The papacy of John Paul II clearly represents one of the conditions of possibility for transnational pro-life activism, but is neither an exhaustive explanation nor a limiting horizon line. *Evangelium Vitae* confirmed what our protagonists were already seeing, believing, and doing.

The transnational story of Polish pro-life actors emerged at the intersection of political thought and social activism. Its key stakes are three-fold: (1) making the case for understanding putatively national pro-life movements in transnational terms; (2) writing religion into the emerging literature about the contemporary global Far Right's grounding in "transnational nationalism"; and (3) demonstrating the importance of an approach to "transnational contention" and "transnational advocacy networks" that incorporates the history of ideas alongside attention to social structures.

From Santiago to Poland: Between Christian Democracy and Catholic Authoritarianism

On a cold and wet January morning in 1999, three leading figures of the Polish Right arrived in London, bound for a private audience with a Latin American celebrity being held under house arrest. Their visit was brief, but momentous (for them). Their host was none other than the long-time former Chilean dictator, General Augusto Pinochet, who was residing at a rented mansion in Surrey in between stints at London medical facilities. Following a Spanish court's 1998 indictment of Pinochet and request for his extradition to stand trial for crimes committed during his long rule over Chile (1973–1990), UK authorities mandated his confinement; although the

Stoeckl, "The Rise of the Russian Christian Right: The Case of the World Congress of Families," *Religion, State and Society* 48, 4 (2020): 223–38; Susanna Mancini and Kristina Stoeckl, "Transatlantic Conversations: The Emergence of Society-Protective Antiabortion Arguments in the United States, Europe, and Russia," in Susanna Mancini and Michel Rosenfeld, eds., *The Conscience Wars: Rethinking the Balance between Religion, Identity, and Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 220–57.

²²See, for example, Martin Rhonheimer, "Fundamental Rights, Moral Law, and the Legal Defense of Life in a Constitutional Democracy: A Constitutionalist Approach to *Evangelium Vitae*," *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 43 (1998): 135–84. For a critical voice, see Stanisław Obirek, "The Many Faces of John Paul II," in Sabrina P. Ramet and Irena Borowik, eds., *Religion, Politics, and Values in Poland: Continuity and Change since 1989* (London: Palgrave, 2016), 41–59.

²³John Paul II, Homily at Mass (Sandomierz, Poland), 12 June 1999, at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/travels/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_12061999_sandomierz.html (accessed 20 Aug. 2025).

²⁴Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Revolution: New Wine, Old Wineskins, and the Second Vatican Council* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

British would ultimately release and return him to Chile in 2000, the indictment and arrest caused an international uproar.²⁵

One of Pinochet's Polish visitors, a Member of Parliament named Michał Kamiński, presented the ailing ex-junta leader with a highly symbolic gift: a military plaque, intended to grace battle armor, depicting Our Lady of Częstochowa, emblem of the Polish cult of the Virgin Mary. Sanctifying Pinochet with this object lifted from heroic Polish battles past, Kamiński channeled a long-standing fascination with Spain and its former overseas empire that characterized his generation of the Polish Right—in particular, their admiration for Spanish-language, anti-communist junta leaders, from Spain's Franco to Chile's Pinochet, who had heavily promoted the Catholic Church.²⁶ The MP would brag that this “was the most important meeting of my whole life. General Pinochet was clearly moved and extremely happy with our visit.”²⁷

This section of our article will focus on one of the other two Poles who took part in that visit: Marek Jurek.²⁸ Unlike his performative colleague, Jurek was a man of ideas. He saw in Pinochet an anti-communist who had taken steps within months of having overthrown the democratically elected President Salvador Allende to reverse socialist promises of liberalizing access to family planning and abortion in Chile.²⁹

This was a war of ideas. Allende was a physician with public health credentials who had published widely on Chile's high infant mortality rates. After carrying out a coup d'état in September 1973, Pinochet pushed back against Allende's scientifically rooted case for family planning with a mix of theology, developmentalism, and national security.³⁰ In 1974, Pinochet established the “Pro-Birth Policy,” promoting natality as a key to national security and severely restricting access to abortion. Ultimately in 1989, in his final months as dictator, Pinochet pushed through a law criminalizing all abortion—the most restrictive of its kind worldwide—which would remain on the books until 2017.³¹ It was in this Pinochet that Jurek found a political hero. And it was

²⁵See, for example, Naomi Roht-Arriaza, “The Pinochet Precedent and Universal Jurisdiction,” *New England Law Review* 35, 2 (2001): 311–319; Carlos Huneeus, “La detención de Pinochet en Londres y la democracia semi-soberana,” CIPER, 22 Oct. 2018, at <https://www.ciperchile.cl/2018/10/22/la-detencion-de-pinochet-en-londres-y-la-democracia-semi-soberana> (accessed 5 Sept. 2025).

²⁶On Franco and the Spanish Civil War as reference points for Latin America's military dictators, see, for example, Kirsten Weld, “The Spanish Civil War and the Construction of a Reactionary Historical Consciousness in Augusto Pinochet's Chile,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 98, 1 (2018): 77–115.

²⁷Timothy Garton Ash, “Cameron May Have Helped the Polish Right, But He Has Not Served Britain,” *Guardian*, 29 July 2009. In the 2010s, Kamiński expressed regret for his earlier adulation of Pinochet: “Michał Kamiński w #RZECZO POLITYCE: Żałuję wizyty u Pinocheta,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 26 Sept. 2016. For the visit's echoes in Polish media, see Małgorzata Kolankowska, *Czerwony i czarny: Polski spór medialny o Chile w latach 1973–2006* (Warsaw: CESLA, 2013).

²⁸The third was the journalist Tomasz Wolek, then editor-in-chief of the conservative daily *Życie* (Life).

²⁹Lidia B. Casas, “Women and Reproduction: From Control to Autonomy? The Case of Chile,” *Journal of Gender, Social Policy, & the Law* 12, 3 (2011): 427–51; María Elena Acuña Moenne, “Embodying Memory: Women and the Legacy of the Military Government in Chile,” Matthew Webb, trans. *Feminist Review* 79 (2005): 150–61.

³⁰See, for example, Salvador Allende, *La realidad médico-social chilena* (Santiago: Minist. de Salubridad, Previsión y Asistencia Social, 1939).

³¹Gloria Maira, Lidia Casas, and Lieta Vivaldi, “Abortion in Chile: The Long Road to Legalization and Its Slow Implementation,” *Health and Human Rights* 21, 2 (2019): 121–31.

out of compassion for what he took to be the suffering of his hero that Jurek traveled to England in 1999, “an act of human compassion, in accordance with my conscience, which I believed to be necessary. This was a visit to a prisoner.”³²

In institutional terms, Jurek found his strongest backing internationally in the late 1980s in the European political family known as Christian Democracy—a “big tent” of center-right and right-wing politicians whose leading political parties (in Austria, Italy, and West Germany) invested millions in the 1980s seeking to reproduce younger versions of themselves in countries emerging from behind the Iron Curtain.³³ Yet we must be clear: Marek Jurek has, in the course of a nearly five-decade-long career in Polish (and European) public life, proven himself to be a committed, outspoken figure of the Far Right—an admirer of the royalist theories of political sovereignty of Charles Maurras, of the staunch anti-republicanism of Francisco Franco, of the natalism of Augusto Pinochet. To Jurek’s mind, these figures and their respective political philosophies form parts of a whole: an overarching Catholic conservatism that, while not completely at odds with procedural democracy, demands heavy-handed authoritarian intervention when needed to safeguard certain incontrovertible, God-given rights.

Having consistently rooted his convictions in the medieval writings of Dominican icon Thomas Aquinas, Jurek has in the twenty-first century narrowed his philosophy of natural law to a focus on the need to fight abortion, contraception, gender equality, and LGBT+ rights. Jurek justified his crusade against those projects by casting them as “a total deregulation of our ethics, the repeal of all moral obligations and expectations, beginning with parenthood. Thanks to this a cultural milieu would result in which everything is allowed, and nothing is required.”³⁴ Historian Tomasz Sikorski has rightly noted that Jurek was from the start of his political activism “fascinated by medievalism—describing the charms and nobility of the medieval state, he concentrated above all on the *ethical absolutism* of Christianity, or *fundamental truths*.”³⁵ In 2007, Jurek resigned as speaker of Poland’s lower house of Parliament because his Law and Justice party (from which he also resigned) proved itself too “opportunistic”—that is, insufficiently committed to the defense of human life. Just two months *after* the Constitutional Tribunal ruling banning abortion in Poland, Jurek chastised his one-time political party for not recognizing that “Politics must differentiate good from evil, for without that it won’t be able either to define the common good or to defend the nation from public evil.”³⁶ For Jurek, ultra-conservatism lacks any performative quality; it is strictly a matter of principle, and in these principles Jurek has been remarkably consistent. Jurek’s example is but the tip of the iceberg. Existing historiography has virtually ignored Polish pro-Pinochet

³²Quoted in Mariusz Janicki and Wiesław Władysław, “Ideowe ewolucje polskiej prawicy,” *Polityka*, 18 Dec. 2012.

³³The West European projects of “transferring” Christian Democracy eastward are documented in detail in Michael Gehler, Piotr H. Kosicki, and Helmut Wohnout, eds., *Christian Democracy and the Fall of Communism* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2019), especially the chapters by Alexander Brakel, Giovanni Maria Ceci, and Helmut Wohnout.

³⁴Jurek, *100 godzin samotności*, 97–98.

³⁵Sikorski, *O kształt polityki polskiej*, 276 (original italics).

³⁶Marek Jurek, “Skutki narodowego wyparcia,” *Teologia Polityczna*, 17 Dec. 2020.

sentiment in favor of more “liberal” critiques of Chilean human rights violations in the 1970s and 1980s.³⁷

To understand the role played by Chile in the history of Polish pro-life activism, it is instructive to perform a deep dive into Jurek’s biography and to map out the conceptual and sociological terrain that surrounded the student-aged Marek Jurek. Born in the city of Gorzów in 1960, he studied history at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. He was a mere nineteen years old when he co-founded the Young Poland Movement (RMP). The movement’s principal architect was the Gdańsk-based aspiring historian Aleksander Hall, editor of the underground student-run journal *Bratniak* (“Fraternal Aid”), who penned most of the movement’s August 1979 founding mission statement. Jurek became one of its twenty-five co-signatories.

Hall and Jurek were both budding nationalist historians, and both came to that cause under the tutelage of Catholic student pastors. They both found a life-long mentor in the venerable Wiesław Chrzanowski, fondly known to his acolytes as the “Nestor of the Polish Right.” Chrzanowski represented a living link between the interwar integral nationalism of Roman Dmowski—with whom Chrzanowski’s father had worked closely—and the more internationally minded Christian Democratic movement, into which Chrzanowski had thrown himself energetically as a young student leader before landing in Stalinist prison in 1948.³⁸ Both Hall and Jurek reflected seriously and systematically in their writings on the intellectual eclecticism needed to provide a sufficiently strong foundation for Polish nationalism, for which the *sine qua non* was the “dignity and natural right of each human being and each national community.”³⁹ To Hall, this meant a critical fusion of different—often, historically antagonistic—nationalist traditions from within the Polish past: Dmowski alongside socialist revolutionary Józef Piłsudski, the messianically driven Józef Hoene-Wroński and Adam Mickiewicz alongside the positivists of the *fin-de-siècle*.⁴⁰

Jurek’s inclinations were more internationalist, but he enthusiastically signed onto the RMP declaration. Fusing Dmowski’s biological determinism with the Romantics’ attachment to the nation’s historical mission, the RMP saw in the Polish nation the vehicle to “preserve the continuity of historical development, such that the values and institutions created can follow in evolutionary terms from the nation’s past and maintain from the past all that is worthy of preservation, all that has been positively affirmed by history.”⁴¹

Our focus here on the RMP’s political theory may seem remote from pro-life activism, but in fact it is impossible to make sense of Marek Jurek’s radical prioritization of right-to-life without the biological casting of nationalism that

³⁷See, for example, Brier, *Poland’s Solidarity Movement and the Global Politics of Human Rights*, 186–199. Important work on pro-Pinochet conservative sentiment elsewhere can be found in Tobias Rupprecht, “The General on His Journeys: Augusto Pinochet’s International Trips and Diverging Transnational Justice and Memory Agendas in the Aftermath of the Cold War,” *Global Society* 33, 3 (2019): 419–35.

³⁸See, for example, Roman Graczyk, *Chrzanowski* (Warsaw: Świat Książki, 2013), 68–98.

³⁹Aleksander Hall, “Czy zagraża nam nacjonalizm?,” *Bratniak*, July–Aug. 1979, 25–29.

⁴⁰On the genealogies of these diverging nationalisms, see, for example, Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴¹Quoted at Tomasz Sikorski and Jacek Wojnicki, *Aleksander Hall: Marzenie o polskiej prawicy* (Sopot: Arche, 2023), 36; “Deklaracja ideowa Ruchu Młodej Polski, 18 VIII 1979,” *Bratniak*, July–Aug. 1979, 6–12.

accompanied him from the beginning of his political career. Jurek emerged rapidly as leader of the “Catholic nationalist” wing of RMP.⁴² Unlike Hall, Jurek married this approach with a quest to resolve the proper relationship between questions of personal morality and moral theology on the one hand and national sovereignty on the other. The organicist metaphor of the sovereign nation as a body politic (headed by a strong executive authority fully entitled to the exercise of violence) is what pulled Jurek as a student of history toward the Middle Ages.

But this did not imply a neglect of European history since the Reformation: rather, the modern Catholic Church’s social doctrine could supply the necessary complement to evolutionary biology and to conservative doctrines of political sovereignty. This was what Jurek’s heroes Charles Maurras (in the 1920s, in the pages of the weekly *Action Française*) and Dmowski (in his 1927 treatise *Church, Nation, State*) had contended, which is why Jurek insisted in the 1980s that any serious politician of the Right should draw on both thinkers. Condemned by a French tribunal as a shill for the Vichy regime, Maurras—the legendary anti-Semitic, anti-republican *Action Française* leader—represented in Jurek’s eyes a model of anti-communist nationalism; Dmowski, meanwhile, remained the central architect of an exclusionary ethnonational vision of modern Poland. To Jurek, both men were heroes for their elevation of the political sovereignty of the nation to near-holy writ.⁴³

What both integral nationalist icons had lacked, however, was deep Catholic faith. While Maurras and Dmowski had reflected instrumentally on the power of Catholic social teaching for the health of a national body politic, both were life-long agnostics. In a 1984 article for the underground *Polityka Polska* (“Polish Politics”), Jurek drew selectively on these earlier thinkers, working out a stance he termed “ethical absolutism”: that Catholic doctrine supplied unshakable foundations for political morality that could never be legitimately challenged by any human-made law.⁴⁴ In a 1985 discussion published in the underground *Powściągliwość i Praca* (“Restraint and Work”), Jurek would add, “Catholics act socially, in order to make the world more perfect. Of course, this is not the sort of perfection that can bring about the Kingdom of God on earth. But it can certainly render the world more perfect.”⁴⁵ A strong executive would be needed to police these ethical boundaries in a democratic political order, and to veto any legislation that crossed the line. To Jurek, the quintessence of such transgressive legislation was the liberalization of access to abortion.

Looking at the world of the 1980s, Jurek—together with his RMP colleagues Jacek Bartyzel and Lech Mażewski—saw in Latin America a beacon of hope for a Christian Right committed to the pursuit of justice, but categorically “opposed to the politics of class egoism.”⁴⁶ Learning from Latin America involved a certain degree of ideological translation for the young Polish Right. Jurek concluded, for example, that Christian

⁴²See, for example, Sikorski, *O kształt polityki polskiej*, 311.

⁴³On Maurras and Dmowski and their intellectual entanglements, see Kosicki, *Catholics on the Barricades*, 21–61.

⁴⁴Marek Jurek, “Prawica: Rodowód i perspektywy,” *Polityka Polska* 6 (1984): 17–20, 17.

⁴⁵“Bez etykiet: O kontynuowaniu przez współczesnych katolików tradycji myśli społecznej rozmawiają: A. Friszke (*Więź*), A. Hall (*Przegląd Katolicki*), M. Jurek (KIK-Poznań), M. Król (*Tygodnik Powszechny*), P. Śpiwák (*Więź*), J. Dworák (*Powściągliwość i Praca*), J. Żakowski (*Powściągliwość i Praca*),” *Powściągliwość i Praca*, Feb.–Mar. 1985, 14.

⁴⁶Jurek, “Prawica,” 20.

Democracy was no longer a realistic candidate for a future ruling party in Poland (he called it a movement “consigned to history”), but it still had much to teach Catholic Poland. In Jurek’s historical analysis, Christian Democracy became the preferred option after modern politics had evolved to the point that piety and procedural democracy no longer seemed to be strictly in contradiction with one another: “When in the end it became clear that democracy does not need to subject the Ten Commandments to a vote, that it can invigorate patriotism understood as responsibility for the fatherland and its traditions [...] this is the moment when there opened up a path to reconciliation.”⁴⁷

In the interest of helping Polish society to achieve “the proper moral maturity and high level of civic duty,” Jurek paid careful attention to Christian Democracy’s European past—and to its Latin American present. The goal was a “democracy recognizing the reality of the common good of society, respecting religion, not claiming a right to revise fundamental moral norms or naturally developed forms of social life.”⁴⁸ In Latin America, Jurek could look to the Christian Democrats of Chile, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador—three countries where, in the 1970s and 1980s, violent authoritarian regimes drew legitimacy in part from civilian politicians identifying with Catholicism.

The figure of Augusto Pinochet has captivated Marek Jurek throughout his political career, beginning with the understanding that Pinochet’s September 1973 coup d’état “saved” Chile from Marxist revolution at the hands of the democratically elected President Allende. Pinochet’s junta shed the blood of tens of thousands while cloaking itself in a Catholic natalism that Jurek, like many far-right Catholics worldwide, found inspiring and worthy of emulation. The term “Pro-Birth Policy” covers a spectrum of moves by the junta spanning the general’s years in power, from the 1973 coup to the 1988 referendum that laid the groundwork for Pinochet to step aside two years later. In a November 1978 white paper prepared by his National Planning Office, Pinochet offered a comprehensive strategy including the introduction of “pro-family” education in state schools, the institution of intrusive state controls for medical procedures connected to fertility or sterilization, and tightening of state surveillance with respect to abortion procedures. The long-term goal was “cohesion in the cultural patrimony essential for the Chilean people,” understood as being fundamentally rooted in “natural rights [that are] self-evident, prior and superior to the State.”⁴⁹ This last phrase was drawn from one of the junta’s first major policy declarations after its violent takeover following the death of President Allende: the March 1974 Declaration of Principles of the Government of Chile.

The bottom line in the self-styled “population politics” of the Pinochet government was clear: “to reaffirm by all possible means the inalienable right to

⁴⁷Marek Jurek, “U źródeł chrześcijańskiej demokracji (I),” *Powściągliwość i Praca*, Nov. 1985, 11–12.

⁴⁸Marek Jurek, “Chrześcijańska Demokracja (II),” *Powściągliwość i Praca*, Dec. 1985, 11.

⁴⁹Presidencia de la República, Oficina de la Planificación Nacional (ODEPLAN), *Política de Población aprobada por Su Excelencia El Presidente de la República y Publicada en El Plan Nacional indicativo de Desarrollo (1978-1983) en noviembre 1978* (Santiago: ODEPLAN, 1979), 7, 3, 1. On ODEPLAN: Carlos Huneeus, “Technocrats and Politicians in an Authoritarian Regime: The ‘ODEPLAN Boys’ and the ‘Gremialists’ in Pinochet’s Chile,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 32, 2 (2000): 461–501. We thank Diego Hurtado Torres for exchanges on this subject.

life, which applies to a being from the moment of conception.”⁵⁰ The junta’s justification for grounding the population politics of post-Allende Chile in a thinly veiled paraphrase of the 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae* deserves to be cited in full:

Chile, in its attempt to offer a dignified future full of meaning to its population, has proposed, rooted in the highest conception of the human being that humanity has ever known, the development of its population, conceiving it as a radical change in the approaches that have been undertaken up to now in this matter. Man is conceivable as a being endowed with spirituality, with which his development begins from the very moment of conception, a process that due to the very notion of transcendence that it contains within itself, should not be stopped, neither by his parents, nor by the State, since a serious conception of life must, in the first order, return to its origins.⁵¹

The starting point of Pinochet’s project of reshaping the corporate body of the nation-state that had elected the socialist Allende in 1970 was first to diagnose in pathological terms the materialist, instrumental treatment of human sexuality in Chilean society. This, in turn, the junta promised to replace with an understanding of human life rooted in a Catholic approach to natural law and natural right.⁵² Even as Pinochet was murdering his political opponents, the medieval writings of Thomas Aquinas thus helped to lend credence to his claim that, unlike the elected government that it had overthrown, the junta respected human life. Pinochet’s official statement on population policy made the case that abortion, “once established in the cultural patrimony of a people,” paves “the way for a complete loss of respect for the lives of others and for one’s own dignity as a human being.”

The logic here was both national and religious—or, perhaps more accurately, national *because* it was religious: “Abortive measures impoverish the meaning of life by destroying the concept of transcendence that it contains.”⁵³ The encoded Catholic language of human “dignity” had been a staple of papal pronouncements since the 1890s. In the mid-1970s, it became the foundation for a far-right vision of national sovereignty and national security exported to the world by Chile. The guiding assumption was that human reproduction was essential to preserving and strengthening the life of a nation: “A nation whose inhabitants have effectively lost the deepest of respect for their own descendants will significantly undermine the foundations that sustain its force of universal projection.”⁵⁴ The medieval anchoring in Thomist natural law, the rooting of nationhood in a Catholic vision of human biology, and the casting of citizens’ “dignity” in the secular realm as a foundation for state policies that must not be subject to procedural challenge—these hallmarks of Pinochet’s Pro-Birth Policy would all become theoretical foundations for Marek

⁵⁰Presidencia de la República..., *Política de Población*, 7; Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney, *The Politics of Motherhood: Maternity and Women’s Rights in Twentieth-Century Chile* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

⁵¹Presidencia de la República..., *Política de Población*, 5

⁵²On the roots of these competing conceptualizations of sexuality, see, for example, Pete Sigal, “Latin America and the Challenge of Globalizing the History of Sexuality,” *American Historical Review* 114, 5 (2009): 1340–53; Margaret Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile: Feminine Power and the Struggle against Allende, 1964–1973* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

⁵³Presidencia de la República..., *Política de Población*, 4.

⁵⁴Presidencia de la República..., *Política de Población*, 4.

Jurek's pro-life activism. According to Jurek, "Pinochet stood at the helm of a coup fulfilling the obligation of defending the country's independence and the nation's liberty."⁵⁵

Across Latin America, presumed socialist revolutionaries were not only challenging private property regimes and class hierarchy, but also demanding liberalization of sexual ethics. For Jurek, this would be impermissible, for "sexual ethics are not a private matter, but a foundation of society and the common good."⁵⁶ Of course, the Right could occasionally take matters too far, as with the assassination of San Salvador archbishop Óscar Romero in March 1980 by death squads linked to the Christian Democrat-supported Salvadoran junta.⁵⁷ Elsewhere in Latin America—especially in Venezuela—prominent Christian Democrats promoted themselves as a "progressive" alternative to communism.⁵⁸ But in Chile, the anti-Pinochet wing within the Christian Democratic Party was small, and it shrank further after a 1975 assassination attempt on former Foreign Minister Bernardo Leighton, with the result that Christian Democracy—headed by former President Eduardo Frei Montalva—long stood strong behind Pinochet. Marek Jurek later cited a famous interview given by Frei to Spain's ABC: "The army saved Chile and saved us all."⁵⁹

Paradoxically, the Chilean dictator who opened Latin America to the "Chicago Boys" and U.S.-style neoliberal economics assumed the mantle of the world's most politically influential practitioner of Catholic social teaching.⁶⁰ Pinochet suppressed labor, rounded up political opponents, and promoted free-market economics—but he banned abortion and restricted access to contraceptives. This made him a hero to Catholic conservatives behind the Iron Curtain.

To be sure, not all RMP thinkers were of one mind when it came to Latin American juntas. Hall, also a Catholic, advised against adulation for Pinochet. Then again, in 1988, even Hall—alongside, notable among older Polish conservatives, Stefan Kisielewski and Marcin Król—refused to sign a "special declaration" put forth by Lech Wałęsa's Citizens' Committee "condemning the authoritarian regime of General Augusto Pinochet in Chile."⁶¹ Clearly, not all of RMP lionized the world's most famous caudillo since Francisco Franco—but they were not going to condemn him either.

The RMP dwelled in this gray area—democratic, but open to authoritarianism under certain circumstances and for certain reasons. Anti-communism and nationalism were their guiding forces. In this respect, the Nestor-like Wiesław Chrzanowski played a pivotal role. A famously kind and genial man and a law

⁵⁵Marek Jurek, "Chile: to czego świat nie chce wiedzieć," *Christianitas*, 18 Dec. 1998.

⁵⁶Jurek, *100 godzin samotności*, 110.

⁵⁷This has not prevented politically engaged right-wing Polish historians like Sławomir Cenckiewicz from declaring that Romero "perished for the sociopolitical ideology that he served, not for divine right and the Catholic faith." "Arcybiskup Oscar Romero—męczennik inaczej," *Do Rzeczy*, 9 Mar. 2015. On August 7, 2025, Cenckiewicz was appointed Poland's National Security Advisor by newly inaugurated President Karol Nawrocki.

⁵⁸Piotr H. Kosicki, *A New Kind of Progressive: How Poles, Venezuelans, and Germans Reimagined Latin America* (in progress).

⁵⁹Jurek, "Chile."

⁶⁰See, for example, Sebastian Edwards, *The Chile Project: The Story of the Chicago Boys and the Downfall of Neoliberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023); Jennifer Burns, *Milton Friedman: The Last Conservative* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2023).

⁶¹Quoted at Sikorski, *O kształt polityki polskiej*, 491.

professor much beloved by his students, Chrzanowski united RMP's various factions in informal seminars held until late in the night in his small Warsaw apartment. Chrzanowski was a National Democrat by conviction, but he maintained correspondence with Polish Christian Democracy's representatives in exile throughout the 1970s and 1980s, receiving multiple invitations (for which he was consistently denied a passport to leave Poland) to network with Christian Democrats in Bonn, Brussels, and Rome. Chrzanowski rejected West European Christian Democrats' embrace of supranationalism and the Social Market Economy; he shared his disciple Marek Jurek's confidence in the future of Catholic nationalism. Chrzanowski once described himself—with a wry smile, but earnest nonetheless—to one of this article's authors as a "closed-minded Catholic."⁶² This meant no dialogue with communists and no compromise on basic ethical questions such as abortion.

By this, Chrzanowski meant to set himself apart from the communist-era Catholic intellectuals who were generally better known internationally, like the self-styled progressive leaders of the officially concessioned Catholic Intelligentsia Club (a.k.a. Znak) movement, legalized in 1956 by communist leader Władysław Gomułka. Andrzej Wielowieyski, a long-time leader of the Warsaw-based club and an editor at the *Więź* monthly, traveled to Latin America in the 1970s to engage in discussions on population politics and sexual ethics. But Wielowieyski was unrepresentatively progressive even for Znak: under pressure from the future Pope John Paul II (Znak's protector in the Polish Church), Wielowieyski would temper his publicly declared openness to contraception.⁶³

Marek Jurek's consistency over nearly five decades of political activism affords us the opportunity to make sense of templates and principles that continue to guide the Polish Right and Far Right in their pro-life activism. We should understand Jurek longitudinally: not merely as a twenty-year-old leader of the Catholic nationalist faction of RMP, but also at the helm nationally of the Independent Students' Association (NZS) in 1980–1981, as a leading underground activist in hiding from Polish authorities during martial law, as a firebrand leader among far-right Polish politicians elected in the semi-free elections of June 1989, and through his two-year stint in 2005–2007 as Speaker of the Sejm (which put him next in line to the presidency). Perhaps most representative among Jurek's twenty-first-century far-right commitments were the stances taken during his five-year stint in the European Parliament in the 2010s, including, for example, his "Yes to family, no to gender" campaign against the 2011 Istanbul Convention on violence against women.⁶⁴

After his election to the (then still communist-dominated) Sejm in June 1989, Jurek received invitations to Vienna (1989) and to Budapest (1990) to join the transnational leadership ranks of European Christian Democracy. Vienna was the seat of the European Democrat Union (EDU), which combined self-styled Christian Democratic and Conservative forces; Budapest hosted in March 1990 a major international congress of Catholic politicians from newly post-communist

⁶² Wiesław Chrzanowski, interviewed by Piotr H. Kosicki, Warsaw, 3 Nov. 2005.

⁶³ Agnieszka Kościńska, "Humanæ Vitæ, Birth Control, and the Forgotten History of the Catholic Church in Poland," in Alana Harris, ed., *The Schism of '68: Catholicism, Contraception, and "Humanæ Vitæ" in Europe, 1945–1975* (London: Palgrave, 2018), 187–210.

⁶⁴ See, for example, Agata Ślusarczyk, "Marek Jurek w Sejmie: czas by ojczyzna św. Jana Pawła II prowadziła samodzielną politykę praw człowieka," *Opoka*, 2 Feb. 2024.

countries.⁶⁵ As the sixty-five-year-old Chrzanowski began declining offers from Europe's Christian Democratic internationals, Western Europe's Christian Democratic leadership looked instead to Jurek as the leading light of a new generation of Polish Catholic politicians from behind the Iron Curtain. In other words, top-tier Catholic transnational powerbrokers like Austria's Alois Mock and Germany's Helmut Kohl were willing in 1989 to empower members of the Catholic Far Right with the resources to build serious political organizations plugged into a continental network.⁶⁶

At the time, Chrzanowski and Jurek were busy co-founding the Christian National Union (ZChN) party, which would do so well in Poland's first fully free elections that Chrzanowski would become Speaker of Parliament's lower house. Jurek focused on national rather than transnational organization-building, but ZChN accepted the EDU's support—as did its competitor, the Center Agreement (PC), led by the Kaczyński brothers, recent dissidents from Lech Wałęsa's presidential office looking to rebrand themselves ideologically. The archives of the European Democrat Union show that for Jarosław Kaczyński the Christian Democratic brand was an appealing “in” to a European club that could raise the PC's credentials. Marek Jurek never thought in such pragmatic terms, and he and Kaczyński have clashed repeatedly on this score over the intervening three decades.⁶⁷

From Jurek's standpoint, a strong executive was needed to enforce ethical boundaries in a pluralistic democracy. In 1989–1990, he hoped that Lech Wałęsa would become this executive and was severely disappointed in subsequent years at the constitutional limitations imposed on the authority of the presidency in the Third Polish Republic. More repugnant to Jurek was the legislative “compromise” on abortion from 1993, which—despite the penalties threatened for facilitating abortion—appeared to Jurek unacceptably transgressive against the boundaries guaranteeing the survival of a sovereign nation.

From Maurras and Dmowski, to Pinochet and the Christian Democrats, Jurek crafted a far-right understanding for late-twentieth-century Poland of a pro-life politics that not only allowed, but indeed expected legislative support for a strong executive authority empowered to deploy violence against attempts to weaken right-to-life guarantees. Unsurprisingly, in the mid-1990s, Jurek embraced *Evangelium Vitae* and the Polish-born Pope John Paul II's denunciation of the “culture of death” supposedly spreading globally. In Jurek's eyes, the pope was calling out social activists for betraying the lessons of the 1970s and 1980s—and nowhere was that betrayal felt more deeply than in the pope's homeland of Poland.⁶⁸

⁶⁵Christian Democratic Union of Central Europe, “Rezolucje Zgromadzenia Generalnego ChDUES / Kongresu / Budapest 2-4/III/1990,” Papers of Franciszek Gałązka (Kraainem); Stanisław Gebhardt, “The Christian Democratic Union of Central Europe,” in Piotr H. Kosicki and Sławomir Łukasiewicz, eds., *Christian Democracy across the Iron Curtain: Europe Redefined* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 411–24.

⁶⁶Michael Gehler and Johannes Schöner, “‘Helping Hands across the Fence’: The Stance of the European Democrat Union toward Developments behind the Iron Curtain,” in Michael Gehler, Piotr H. Kosicki, and Helmut Wohnout, eds., *Christian Democracy and the Fall of Communism* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2019), 93–120.

⁶⁷Regarding Jurek: Archiv des Karl von Vogelsang-Instituts (AKVI, Vienna): European Democrat Union collection (EDU) 1989/1706. Regarding Kaczyński, see AKVI: EDU, Polen—L—PC (Sept. 1991–1995/96).

⁶⁸See, for example, Cezary Gawryś, “Za późno: Coś niedobrego dzieje się z polskim chrześcijaństwem,” *Wież*, 19 Jan. 2018.

Jurek's political career began in 1978, the year of his compatriot's election to the papacy. But Jurek did not simply parrot the Polish pope: on his own terms, over decades, he fine-tuned a principled justification for Polish pro-life activism. The 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* appears only a handful of times in Jurek's 2021 book-length screed against the Law and Justice party's putatively lukewarm response to the Women's Strike. By that time, Jurek had already anchored his secular commitments for decades in his religious beliefs while insisting that others do the same: first as an anti-communist RMP activist, then as a co-founder of the ZChN party and its Member of Parliament, and finally as a top-tier Polish politician willing to resign his office on principle and take his integralist advocacy to Brussels as a Member of the European Parliament. *Evangelium Vitae* was a confirmation, not a cause, of Jurek's long-standing transnational orientation. A far-right figure out of principle, Jurek gave up the second-most powerful public position in the Polish state in 2007 because the Law and Justice party that he represented refused to adopt a more authoritarian line in defense of the right to life. One month after he resigned as speaker, Jurek spoke at a World Congress of Families meeting, affirming his transnational commitment to strengthening Poland's standing as a beacon of global pro-life activism. This was Jurek's model for a Catholic Far Right, born of the RMP but battle-tested in a post-Soviet political order.

Transnational in his nationalism, Marek Jurek has served as an intellectual and political transmission belt, delivering key foundations for the future of Polish pro-life activism. In the 1980s, Jurek's writings reflected studious attention to the history of European Christian Democracy and the ongoing dilemmas of Catholicism in Latin American public life. Jurek ultimately found in Pinochet's Chile a compelling example of a secular regime willing to orient its understanding of national sovereignty around a Catholic vision of the dignity of human life. As a transnational mediator for pro-life activism, Jurek bucked marginal and mainstream status alike: he not only shaped multiple generations of aspiring pro-life activists on the Polish Right, but was willing to defend a bloody twentieth-century dictatorship and to call for Poles and their European partners to follow in its footsteps in the twenty-first century. This was not a Christian Democratic path, but Jurek has maintained a respectful stance toward Christian Democracy, all while rejecting the perceived compromises that its West European incarnations made with political liberalism. Although Jurek's political imaginary has from the start been global in its horizons, he remains a quintessentially Polish actor, seeking to channel the universal dictates of the Roman Catholic Church on human life into a lasting biopolitical foundation for a strong, sovereign Polish nation.

From Washington to Gdańsk: Ewa Kowalewska, Lech Kowalewski, and Poland's U.S. Pro-Life Engagements

In December 1992, the Polish pro-life magazine *Głos dla Życia* (Voice for Life) featured an interview with U.S. activist Father Paul Marx, a Benedictine monk, sociology professor, and founder of the conservative Catholic anti-abortion organization Human Life International (HLI). The interviewer Ewa Kowalewska, one of the editors of the magazine, asked questions on the current situation in Poland, where the Parliament and the public square were heatedly debating a law on abortion. Marx responded that he came to Poland, a country he had already visited several

times, to “save her from passing a bad law,” containing abortion exceptions. As he ascertained: “if there are exceptions, it will end up with abortion on demand, as was the case in many other countries.” He also expressed his hope that “Poland would become an example for the whole world” in regard to abortion legislation.⁶⁹ The interview with Marx was not the only international pro-life material in this issue of the magazine. On the following pages, one might read the interview with Dr. John (Jack) Willke from the National Right to Life Committee or notice an advertisement for the book *Abortion: Questions and Answers* authored by Willke and his wife, Barbara, and translated into Polish by Kowalewska and her husband, Lech Kowalewski.

Before it was published as a book, the Polish translation of *Abortion: Questions and Answers*, appeared in excerpts in 1990 in the weekly *Młoda Polska* (*Young Poland*), the magazine of RMP. The magazine served as the first significant platform of transnational exchange between Kowalewska and Kowalewski and the U.S. pro-life movement. From the early 1990s on, the couple partnered with U.S. leaders such as Willke or Marx, and their engagements oftentimes transcended the borders of Poland, impacting Eastern Europe more broadly, and Russia in particular. We show in this section how internal disagreements and criticisms within the U.S. anti-abortion movements played out in the Polish context, although they did not prevent Polish activists like Kowalewska and Kowalewski from strategically cooperating with the conflicted American sides.

The anti-abortion movement that Kowalewski and Kowalewska represented dated its beginnings in Poland to the late 1950s. The organized movement came into existence by the mid-1970s. The first Polish pro-life group “Concern for Life” (*Troska o Życie*) was initiated in 1977 in Lublin and then spread to Katowice and Wrocław.⁷⁰ As the 1980s began, several anti-abortion circles formed in parishes in Warsaw; in 1981 enthusiasts of natural family planning established in Szczecin the Society for Responsible Parenthood, defined largely by its anti-abortion agenda. Several pro-life initiatives were also launched in the 1980s in Poznań and Gdańsk.⁷¹ These activists offered material support to pregnant women considering an abortion, established for such women telephone and/or in-person counseling, and even confronted them directly in some hospitals and maternity wards in order to “rescue the baby.”⁷² During the years of communist rule, the multifaceted and fragmented pro-life movement relied greatly on the Catholic Church, which served as the nucleus for anti-abortion activities and provided physical space for pro-life displays, photos, and films. All these initiatives laid the foundation for post-1989 anti-abortion activities.⁷³

⁶⁹Paul Marx, interviewed by Ewa Kowalewska, “W prawie do życia nie można robić wyjątków,” *Głos dla Życia* 6 (1992): 1.

⁷⁰Polish anti-abortion activists, in correspondence with Father Marx, translated the name as “Concerned for Life.” We take the liberty of correcting the grammar here, since the original Polish is in noun, not adjective, form.

⁷¹Sylwia Kuźma-Markowska and Laura Kelly, “Anti-Abortion Activism in Poland and the Republic of Ireland c. 1970s–1990s,” *Journal of Religious History* 46, 3 (2022): 526–51.

⁷²Jerzy Drązkiewicz, *Świadek i pomoc: o ruchach antyaborcyjnych w Warszawie* (Warsaw: Instytut Socjologii, 1988).

⁷³Sylwia Kuźma-Markowska, “The Anti-abortion Movement, Catholic Church, and Communist State: Poland in the 1970s and 1980s,” to appear in *History of the Family*, doi: <http://doi.org/10.1080/1081602X.2025.2557550>.

Kowalewska and Kowalewski joined these anti-abortion initiatives in the early 1990s. They became well-known not only in the pro-life milieu but also in political circles thanks to their translation of the Willkes' book and its publication in *Młoda Polska*. In the first years after the democratic transition, during the critical moment of the public and parliamentary debate on abortion legislation, the magazine became the crucial platform for the Polish anti-abortion movement, influencing not only the general public but first and foremost the politicians discussing the law. As Kowalewska recalled in one of her interviews, *Młoda Polska* "was read by all politicians at the time."⁷⁴ The first material on abortion appeared in the third issue of the magazine.⁷⁵ The following issue featured a page-long article by Kowalewska, with the emotionally charged title "Let's Stop Being Afraid" (*Przestańmy się bać*).⁷⁶ Soon, *Młoda Polska*'s readers began to be regularly informed about international developments regarding abortion: first from the reporting on the U.S. Operation Rescue by the magazine's editor-in-chief (and RMP leader) Wiesław Walendziak,⁷⁷ and later thanks to the serial, weekly publication of *Abortion: Questions and Answers*.

The couple shaped *Młoda Polska*'s stance on abortion during the first years of the magazine's publication, with Kowalewska's article "Let's Stop Being Afraid" outlining the fundamental principles of her anti-abortion agenda and activism built on the Catholic understanding of marriage and sexuality, propagated in the papal encyclicals *Casti connubii* and *Humanae Vitae*. As Kowalewska stressed, in the contemporary world, love and the resultant happiness were reduced to sexual pleasure, whereas sex became detached from marriage and from love. "Not surprisingly, in such a climate, fertility also becomes separated from love and marriage, and even sex" she added, continuing: "The very consciousness of fertility is rejected, and the need for any moderation in the area of sex is ridiculed and denied." Kowalewska insisted that, since contraception is never one hundred percent reliable, abortion is treated as the most efficient form of birth control. By such an equation, Kowalewska conjoined abortion with contraceptives, in line with other proponents of the Catholic vision of marriage and sexuality—most notably, Pope John Paul II.⁷⁸ Invoking the Gospels on the need to accept and understand others, she did not condemn women terminating pregnancies, instead depicting them as "unhappy" and in need of a "positive path" regarding fertility and sexuality. This foundational article closed with a call for practical action that stressed the necessity of education in relation to pregnant women, who were in need of knowledge about the nature and consequences of abortion (including the fictitious post-abortion syndrome), as well as to school-age children and their sexual education.⁷⁹

The equation of abortion and contraception present in Kowalewska's article might have stemmed from her earlier work in Church-based family counseling services (*poradnictwo rodzinne*). Counseling services instructed Catholic couples in natural family planning (including the rhythm method or Billings method), criticizing

⁷⁴Ewa Kowalewska and Lech Kowalewski, "Wszyscy razem musimy chronić nasze dzieci," *Jeden z nas*, 1 Oct. 2019.

⁷⁵"Deklaracja Społecznego Komitetu Protestu Przeciw Zabijaniu Nienarodzonych," *Młoda Polska* 3 (1989): 9.

⁷⁶Ewa Kowalewska, "Przestańmy się bać," *Młoda Polska* 2 (1990): 10.

⁷⁷Wiesław Walendziak, "Abortion: No!," *Młoda Polska* 5 (1990): 10–11.

⁷⁸Christopher Tollefsen, ed., *John Paul II's Contribution to Catholic Bioethics* (Cham: Springer, 2005).

⁷⁹Kowalewska, "Przestańmy się bać," 10.

“artificial contraception” (for example, the pill or the IUD) and campaigning against abortion.⁸⁰ In her autobiographical narrative, Kowalewska presented herself as at first appalled by the issue of abortion, insisting that she “totally didn’t feel like looking at the nightmarish photos of slain children” [aborted fetuses—the authors].⁸¹ It was only during a lecture by Jack and Barbara Willke at an international pro-life conference in Yugoslavia, where her husband served as translator from the English, that she decided she could not remain indifferent and indeed had to devote herself to the “defense of life.”⁸²

Lech Kowalewski’s knowledge of English as well as his wife’s Polish philology background and journalistic experience proved fundamental for the couple’s international anti-abortion engagements, including the translation and publication of *Abortion: Questions and Answers*. The book circulated in the United States beginning in 1988 and was printed in several editions, gradually achieving translation into other languages. The educational and instructional character of the publication, infused with scholarly references and statistical data, impeded its translation into Polish, despite efforts by Kowalewska and Kowalewski to find a person capable of familiarizing Polish readers with its content. As Ewa Kowalewska recalled more than thirty years later, “In the end, we decided to try it ourselves, as always combining our skills. Lech has an excellent command of English, as he went to school in Canada. So, he would translate after work and explain the contexts to me, and I would make Polish out of it in the morning.”⁸³

The translation of *Abortion: Questions and Answers* was not the first time when the Polish public became acquainted with the arguments used by Jack and Barbara Willke in their anti-abortion work. Since the mid-1970s, images and commentaries from the Willkes’ earlier two publications—*The Handbook on Abortion* (1972) and a brochure with its excerpts entitled *Life or Death* (1975)—circulated within “Concern for Life” and confessional movements such as Poland’s Catholic Intelligentsia Clubs (KIK).⁸⁴ The images from *The Handbook*, presenting enlarged photos of aborted fetuses with the express goal of emotionally disturbing the viewers,⁸⁵ were reproduced by KIK as full-sized photographs, presumably with the purpose of displaying them during Catholic marriage counseling or at exhibitions in churches.⁸⁶ *Abortion: Questions and Answers*, however, differed significantly from the Willkes’ earlier publications. It supported anti-abortion rationale with supposedly scientific data, rather than shocking the readers.

As Kowalewska and Kowalewski stressed in the preamble to the first part of the Polish translation, Jack and Barbara Willke produced a book that “contained extraordinarily rich material supported by world scientific authorities.”⁸⁷ The translation was published in thirty installments in the year 1990’s issues of *Młoda*

⁸⁰Sylvia Kuźma-Markowska and Agata Ignaciuk, “Family Planning Advice in State Socialist Poland: Local and Transnational Engagements,” *Medical History* 64, 2 (2020): 240–66.

⁸¹Kowalewska and Kowalewski, “Wszyscy razem.”

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ewa Kowalewska and Lech Kowalewski, “Nigdy nie liczyliśmy, ile dzieci udało się uratować, tę statystykę pozostawiając Panu Bogu,” *Aleteia*, 24 June 2024.

⁸⁴Kuźma-Markowska and Kelly, “Anti-Abortion Activism,” 537–38.

⁸⁵Johanna Schoen, *Abortion after Roe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 72–75.

⁸⁶Kuźma-Markowska and Kelly, “Anti-Abortion Activism,” 537–8.

⁸⁷Ewa Kowalewska and Lech Kowalewski, “Słowo wstępne,” *Młoda Polska* 6 (1990): 10.

Polska, in the “Pro-life” section of the magazine that at times featured other anti-abortion authors and materials. The Polish reader might learn in *Abortion: Questions and Answers* about the “development of the baby” [the fetus—the authors], as well as grasp the definition of life and determination of the moment of conception. The book discussed the abortion procedure and its physical and mental consequences (including the strategically publicized post-abortion syndrome), as well as the impact of abortion on “Western civilization.” Every translated part included references to medical literature as well as to pro-life materials such as the fictitious pseudo-documentary *The Silent Scream* (1987) by Bernard Nathanson. The authors (and the translators) did not diverge from the main topic, in line with Jack Willke’s presumption that the “pro-life” movement “needed to be strictly single-issue” to achieve its aim.⁸⁸

In the same year as its appearance in the pages of the weekly, the Polish translation of *Abortion: Questions and Answers* was published in book form, and then reissued the following year.⁸⁹ The first edition, as claimed by Kowalewska and Kowalewski, was distributed in 40,000 copies.⁹⁰ The success of the publication might have stemmed partially from the direct involvement of Jack Willke in its publicity; during his two-week tour in Poland in 1991 he spoke about *Abortion: Questions and Answers* in about ten Polish cities, disseminating what he believed to be “brand new information to most of those audiences at that point.”⁹¹ Willke presented the arguments from the book at the meeting of a parliamentary commission, and excerpts from *Abortion: Questions and Answers* were read aloud during the abortion debates in the Parliament.⁹²

The translation and the publication of *Abortion: Questions and Answers* constituted the peak of the cooperation between Kowalewska and Kowalewski and the Willkes. This was the heyday of the Polish anti-abortion movement. After the collapse of communism in 1989, the Willkes’ writings fully entered the Polish public sphere, with representation in public and private media, and protestors on the streets wielding “right-to-life” slogans. Not only did the Catholic hierarchy openly support the parliamentary bills criminalizing abortion, but also a dominant group in the opposition pushed for abortion law changes.⁹³ Several new associations launched at that time came together with old, communist-era pro-life groups to form the Polish Federation of the Movement for the Protection of Life in 1992.⁹⁴ Ewa Kowalewska became one of its co-founders, and in the ensuing years Lech joined, thanks to Willke’s invitation, the International Right to Life Federation, accelerating the couple’s elevation within the global pro-life movement. From late

⁸⁸ Prudence Flowers, *The Right-to-Life Movement, the Reagan Administration, and the Politics of Abortion* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 17.

⁸⁹ Barbara and Jack Willke, *Aborcja: pytania i odpowiedzi*, Ewa Kowalewska and Lech Kowalewski, trans. (Gdańsk: Stella Maris, 1990); Barbara and Jack Willke, *Aborcja: pytania i odpowiedzi*, Ewa Kowalewska and Lech Kowalewski, trans., expanded ed. (Gdańsk: Stella Maris, 1991).

⁹⁰ Kowalewska and Kowalewski, “Nigdy nie liczyliśmy.”

⁹¹ John Willke, *Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia* (Cincinnati: Hayes Publishing, 1998), 343.

⁹² Kowalewska and Kowalewski, “Nigdy nie liczyliśmy.”

⁹³ Marcin Kościelniak, *Aborcja i demokracja: przeciw-historia Polski 1956–1993* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2024).

⁹⁴ Kuźma-Markowska, “The Anti-Abortion Movement.”

1992, Kowalewska and Kowalewski became, however, mostly engaged in another transnational anti-abortion endeavor orchestrated by Father Paul Marx.

Marx's and the Willkes' paths to anti-abortion activism joined in 1970, when the Benedictine monk from Minnesota recruited Barbara and Jack Willke to the nascent U.S. pro-life movement. From the late 1960s, American Catholics mobilized against ongoing changes in abortion legislation, with Protestants gradually joining the increasingly ecumenical movement.⁹⁵ The Willkes, according to historian Prudence Flowers, came to pro-life activism "from the movement against sex education, where they preached against contraception, pornography, and homosexuality."⁹⁶ In the course of his pro-life work, however, John Willke began to believe not only in the strategic necessity to focus single-mindedly on abortion, abandoning other issues such as contraception, but also in the inevitability of the political compromise allowing an abortion law with exceptions.⁹⁷ In this regard, Willke differed significantly from the uncompromising Father Marx, who in the 1980s and 1990s promoted a broad agenda encompassing not only abortion without exceptions but also the critique of contraception or secular sexual education.

Beginning in 1981, with the establishment of HLI, Marx and his collaborators spread pro-life messaging beyond the borders of the United States. HLI quickly became an organization "global in scope," with Father Marx seeing himself as a "missionary" working to address the lack of 'pro-life consciousness' in poor and developing countries.⁹⁸ At the time when the priest was launching his transnational activities, U.S. pro-life movement leaders held out high hopes for the recently elected President Ronald Reagan. Although Reagan limited U.S. international family planning programs, his presidency did not result in the significant legislative gains that the American right-to-lifers had anticipated. During Reagan's presidency, Congress failed to pass a fetal personhood amendment, and the leaders of the movement disapproved of Reagan's Supreme Court nominee Sandra Day O'Connor due to her abortion stances.⁹⁹ At the same time that HLI's activities in the 1980s contributed to the victories of abortion opponents in Latin America and Ireland, the organization's engagement in Eastern Europe, Poland included, aimed at manipulating "the anxieties generated by rapid social and political changes in Eastern Europe to gain support for and advance its pro-family agenda."¹⁰⁰ Kathryn Slattery named Poland "HLI's most conspicuous success," but her research only looked at the Polish HLI's endeavors from the U.S. side, without acknowledging the perspectives of local pro-life proponents such as Kowalewska and Kowalewski.¹⁰¹

In the second half of the 1980s, a network of Polish correspondents emerged who were financed by Marx, supplied with anti-abortion materials, invited to and sponsored by the U.S., and visited at home in Poland. At that time, the key Polish interlocutors for Marx included Szczecin's Zbigniew Szymański, Katowice's Andrzej Winkler and Kazimierz Trojan, as well as several people from Lublin (from the

⁹⁵Daniel K. Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn: The Pro-Life Movement before Roe v. Wade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁹⁶Schoen, *After Roe*, 72.

⁹⁷Flowers, *The Right-to-Life Movement*, 17.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 19.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰Slattery, "Building a 'World Coalition for Life,'" 235.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 256.

Catholic University of Lublin, in particular), including academics, both clergy and laypersons. In the late 1980s, HLI's president exchanged letters with Polish pro-life icon Wanda Póltawska, a friend and confidante of Pope John Paul II. Póltawska had long influenced the pope's thinking about reproduction and sexuality, leaving a mark on his teachings and his contribution to *Humanae Vitae*.¹⁰² Although Marx was interested in Polish affairs and exchanged letters with Poles in the first half of the 1980s, his regular correspondence with Polish anti-abortion activists dated only from 1986, with the letter sent by Trojan and Winkler introducing their pro-life group "Concern for Life" to the HLI president.¹⁰³ Marx's immediate response to the letter initiated a vivid exchange of materials and ideas that, according to the Polish interlocutors, would be "of mutual value."

The contacts with "Concern for Life" and other Polish anti-abortion milieus strengthened after the 1987 visit of HLI's president to Poland. Marx spent time in Lublin and Katowice, elevating these two Polish anti-abortion centers to global stature.¹⁰⁴ The American priest's visit, and the resulting contacts with Polish pro-life activists, brought about the establishment of two branches of HLI in Poland. Both were set up on Marx's initiative, first in Szczecin and second in Katowice. The branches involved the most frequent and committed correspondents of Father Marx in communist Poland: Szymański in the former case, and Trojan and Winkler in the latter.¹⁰⁵ In 1993 HLI opened an office in Gdańsk, making it the headquarters of its European operations and designating Ewa Kowalewska its director.¹⁰⁶

Kowalewska and Kowalewski had not belonged to the circle of Marx's Polish correspondents in the 1980s. In the fall of 1991, Winkler, from the southern city of Katowice, wrote to Father Marx that "guys from the North complain" that HLI's president focuses on and does everything for "the South of Poland." Mentioning that Kowalewska and Kowalewski were in touch with the National Right to Life Committee and were translating the Willkes' *Abortion: Questions and Answers*, Winkler described his northern counterparts from Gdańsk as "very motivated and cooperative to spread pro-life ideas."¹⁰⁷ Preceded by such an introduction, Kowalewska and Kowalewski met Paul Marx during his 1992 trip to Poland. Their exchanges included an interview with HLI's president for *Głos dla Życia*. Already at that time, according to Kowalewska, Marx was searching for a location to headquarter HLI's European operations. It was, however, Lech Kowalewski's later trip to a pro-life congress in Texas that resulted in the choice of Gdańsk for HLI's headquarters in Europe, with Kowalewska tapped to serve as its director. As she asserted jokingly, her husband "just sold her to Marx," agreeing that his wife would head the office as he "runs his own company and does not have time."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰²Kościanańska, "Humanae Vitae, Birth Control, and the Forgotten History of the Catholic Church in Poland."

¹⁰³Paul Marx Papers, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana (henceforth PMX), Kazimierz Trojan and Andrzej Winkler to Paul Marx, Easter 1986.

¹⁰⁴PMX, Paul Marx Diaries, 11–24 Oct.

¹⁰⁵PMX, Zbigniew Szymański to Paul Marx, 7 June 1988; Paul Marx to Kazimierz Trojan, 16 Dec. 1987.

¹⁰⁶"Europejskie biuro HLI powstało w Polsce," *Human Life International—Europa Newsletter* (Polish version) 1 (1994): 1.

¹⁰⁷PMX, Andrzej Winkler to Paul Marx, 11 Oct. 1991.

¹⁰⁸Kowalewska and Kowalewski, "Nigdy nie liczyliśmy."

If this narrative presents Marx's choices as accidental, his decisions were in fact motivated by the assessment that Kowalewska and Kowalewski—and their collaborator and publisher from Poznań, Paweł Wosicki—were highly valued assets, equipped with skills and know-how indispensable for HLI's eastward expansion. Reporting in his diary on practical issues involved in setting up the Gdańsk office, Marx stressed "Lech's wife's" knowledge of Russian and Polish and her translating abilities. Expressing his excitement, he added, "my mind is swimming when I think of the opportunities we have unleashed here with a Russian-speaking, editorial woman, her husband speaking totally good English, and a publisher who is not greedy and willing to print for reasonable compensation."¹⁰⁹ Marx never mentioned Ewa Kowalewska in his diary by her name, seemingly objectifying her, and treating her not as an independent individual but as the "wife" of Lech Kowalewski. His treatment of Kowalewska spoke to gendered relations in the pro-life movement as well as broader gendered ramifications of far-right national politics.

Ewa Kowalewska was in fact one of the few women from Poland involved in the transnational pro-life movement and one of the very few Polish female right-to-life activists. The main actors in (Latin) American as well as in Polish anti-abortion endeavors were men, oftentimes the male clergy of the Catholic Church. The masculinization of pro-life activism in Poland was reflective of a broader process characterizing the 1989 democratic transition. As sociologists Peggy Watson and Valentine M. Moghadam have both stressed, the political and economic transformation in the countries of Eastern Europe entailed the exclusion of women from political and economic power and the construction of a "man's world." The process brought about the severe curtailing of reproductive rights, abortion in particular, as post-communist abortion policies were a part of the masculinization of the public sphere.¹¹⁰ The new nationalist project of Poland's Far Right entailed the introduction of traditional gender relations, in which women were envisaged mainly as the ones reproducing the nation.¹¹¹

Ewa Kowalewska's skills and contacts were, however, central to HLI's Eastern European pro-life endeavors. The opening of HLI-Europe headquarters in 1993 in Gdańsk solidified and formalized the U.S. movement's by-then long-standing relations with Polish anti-abortion activists. After the 1989 political transition, Gdańsk became the epicenter of Polish pro-life activism. This happened both because of support and ties with the Polish democratic opposition *and* because of the support of the transnational anti-abortion movement. The decision to move the European headquarters of HLI from Yugoslavia to Gdańsk stemmed from Paul Marx's perception of Gdańsk as the cradle of the Solidarity movement and of Poland as one of the most Catholic countries in the world.¹¹² HLI's president also remarked on Poland's geopolitical potential as a bridge between the West and the East. As he stressed in his diary after a 1993 trip to Gdańsk, Poland was "a gateway to Eastern Europe," particularly to Russia, which Marx aspired to penetrate with his

¹⁰⁹PMX, Paul Marx Diaries, 8 June 1993: 12–13.

¹¹⁰Peggy Watson, "Eastern Europe's Silent Revolution: Gender," *Sociology* 27, 3 (1993): 471–87; Valentine M. Moghadam, "Gender and Revolutionary Transformation: Iran 1979 and East Central Europe 1989," *Gender and Society* 9, 3 (1995): 328–58.

¹¹¹Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 1997).

¹¹²"Europejskie biuro HLI powstało w Polsce," 1.

pro-life “missionary” work.¹¹³ It was a project in which Kowalewska and Kowalewski played an instrumental role. In the 1990s, the Gdańsk HLI office indeed became a major player in anti-abortion campaigns across the border in the former Soviet Union.

HLI’s European headquarters in Gdańsk opened a few months after the abortion law was voted on and passed in the Polish Parliament. Although the 1993 legislation did not fully meet the expectations of Kowalewska and Kowalewski or of Father Marx, who hoped for an abortion ban without exceptions, it still constituted a remarkable success for the Polish (and global) pro-life movement. Polish activists’ victory gave credibility to transnational pro-life leaders like Willke and Marx, proving their engagement in Polish affairs worthy of effort. The near-total abortion ban made abortion illegal in all but three cases: danger to women’s health or life, serious fetal deformity, and pregnancy resulting from rape or incest. The victory in Poland prompted and facilitated the shift of HLI’s focus to the east, where in the following years Kowalewska and Kowalewski trained natural family planning instructors, supported local anti-abortion initiatives, and spread pro-life ideas such as the post-abortion syndrome.¹¹⁴ In the 1990s, Kowalewska likewise remained engaged in pro-life work in Poland, serving as editor-in-chief of *Głos dla Życia*, which published articles by several of Marx’s other interlocutors and collaborators such as Wosicki, Trojan, and Winkler. On both fronts, national and international, she and her husband spread a well-defined set of pro-life ideas very much in line with Marx’s agenda.

Kowalewska, Kowalewski, and Marx shared a pro-life program containing such principles as abortion without exceptions and equating abortion with contraception. The Polish pro-life movement’s homegrown agenda was all-encompassing, including not only opposition to abortion but also to contraception and sexual education. Here Polish activists’ views resembled the outlook of Paul Marx and differed from John Willke with his “single-issue” strategy, and from Bernard Nathanson, both criticized by Marx for their insufficient radicalism. Disapproving in a letter to Winkler that Nathanson did not treat IUDs and the pill as abortifacients, Father Marx turned up the temperature on Poles to position themselves at the more radical end of the international pro-life movement.¹¹⁵ Arguably, HLI came to see Poland as an extension of its own domestic battleground as it jockeyed for predominance within the U.S. pro-life scene.

In spite of his critical views, Paul Marx kept supplying Polish activists with copies of Nathanson’s *Silent Scream* and with posters featuring images from the Willkes’ *Life or Death*.¹¹⁶ These two resources were fundamental in establishing the idea of fetal personhood, solidified by visual, audio, and then audiovisual materials that manipulated fetal images or aimed at presenting the fetus as an independent, intentional person with free will and autonomy apart from its mother.¹¹⁷ Prior to 1989, Polish pro-life activists lacked the technology to produce such materials by themselves. As Trojan and Winkler put it in a letter to Marx, Poles were “totally

¹¹³PMX, Paul Marx Diaries, 7 June 1993: 12–13.

¹¹⁴Ewa Kowalewska, “Odpowiedzialnego rodzicielstwa uczymy na wschodzie,” *Human Life International – Europa Newsletter* (Polish version) 1 (1997): 1.

¹¹⁵PMX, Paul Marx to Andrzej Winkler, 25 July 1989.

¹¹⁶PMX, Andrzej Winkler to Paul Marx, 20 June 1989; Paul Marx to Wanda Półtawska, 6 May 1988.

¹¹⁷Deborah Lupton, *The Social Worlds of the Unborn* (Cham: Springer, 2013).

dependent in the field of educational aids on our benevolent Western sponsors.”¹¹⁸ The transfer of U.S.-origin materials emphasizing fetal personhood, including objects such as plastic fetal dolls, took off substantially in the mid-1980s, thanks to connections established by Polish anti-abortion activists with HLI. Photos of fetal images filled early 1990s pro-life magazines such as *Młoda Polska* and *Głos dla Życia* that advertised U.S. pro-life films and printed publications. Even though some Polish activists found them “too drastic,” they agreed with Marx that photos and films were most successful in spreading the pro-life message “because, when seen, reality is facing the viewer and he must make a decision.”¹¹⁹

Criticism followed the attempt to transfer to Poland the concept of the so-called “post-abortion syndrome,” a fictitious belief that women undergoing abortion always suffer from negative psychological effects.¹²⁰ Marx’s long-time correspondent, the psychologist Andrzej Winkler, stressed the connection between abortion and addictions, alcoholism in particular.¹²¹ In 1991, he spoke about the syndrome in front of a group of psychologists. He later reported back to HLI’s president that “at least half of the listeners denied the reality of post-abortion suffering ... and some of them were criticizing Americans for ‘inventing the problem.’”¹²² However, other U.S. media, including *Abortion: Questions and Answers*, strengthened the belief that mental anguish must inevitably follow abortion. In the following years, the notion of the syndrome was strategically deployed in anti-abortion campaigns on both sides of the Atlantic.

With the translation of *Abortion: Questions and Answers*, membership in the International Right to Life Federation, and leadership in HLI Europe, Ewa Kowalewska and Lech Kowalewski joined the global pro-life movement in the 1990s. In their transnational anti-abortion engagements, the couple were not only collaborators and interlocutors of John Willke and Father Paul Marx, but were intermediaries in U.S. efforts to spread the pro-life message eastward. Kowalewska and Kowalewski’s transnational activism contributed significantly to victories in the Polish anti-abortion campaigns, particularly to the toughening of abortion law. Thanks to the translation of *Abortion: Questions and Answers* and the dissemination of visual and audiovisual pro-life materials, the activists provided the Polish public with convincing anti-abortion rationales and frameworks like fetal personhood or post-abortion syndrome. The transfer of these concepts began during the last two decades of communism, when Polish right-to-lifers laid the foundation for future activism in democratic Poland. Two elements—international exchanges and collaborations, and the supporting role of the Catholic Church—were fundamental in Polish pre- and post-1989 pro-life engagements.

Conclusions

The stories of Marek Jurek, Ewa Kowalewska, and Lech Kowalewski could easily be cast in purely national terms: Polish pro-lifers uniting theory and practice in a quest

¹¹⁸PMX, Kazimierz Trojan and Andrzej Winkler to Paul Marx, Easter 1986.

¹¹⁹PMX, Paul Marx to Anna Socha, 16 Mar. 1991.

¹²⁰Rachel Louise Moran, “A Women’s Health Issue? Framing Post-Abortion Syndrome in the 1980s,” *Gender & History* 33 (2021): 790–804.

¹²¹Justyna Włodarczyk, “Manufacturing Hysteria: The Import of US Abortion Rhetorics to Poland,” *Gender* 52 (2010).

¹²²PMX, Andrzej Winkler to Paul Marx, 1 Mar. 1991: 2.

to strengthen right-to-life protections.¹²³ But just as their stories are products of a uniquely telling historical moment—the decades spanning the end of communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe—so are they unintelligible without their transnational rooting. Jurek borrowed from the European past and the Latin American present to crystallize a Catholic far-right politics that founded national sovereignty on the unshakeable legal guarantee of right-to-life; in the twenty-first century, he then transferred Polish lessons back to the rest of the European Union and beyond, via the European Parliament and the World Congress of Families. Kowalewska and Kowalewski became conduits for the passage of copious quantities of U.S.-origin anti-abortion audiovisual and textual material to Poland; once Father Paul Marx's Human Life International opened its European headquarters in Gdańsk, Ewa Kowalewska became the agenda-setter for a pro-life crusade extending into the former Soviet Union. All three of our protagonists were transnational mediators whose activism crossed borders and assured that Polish pro-life agendas would not remain solely Polish.

For this reason, we have undertaken a *histoire croisée* of these broadly defined Polish-(Latin) American pro-life exchanges. In terms of the social theory of transnational activism, this field of (trans)national contention is not strictly reducible either to structural isomorphism nor to the modular processes typologized, for example, by Tarrow and McAdam.¹²⁴ As Agnieszka Pasieka has argued, “far-right actions that transcend national borders both move beyond the national context and remain strongly embedded in it.”¹²⁵

It is *not* our contention that Chilean influence directly triggered U.S. influence, or vice versa. Rather, these distinct causal chains acted independently and simultaneously on Poland via intellectual mediators like Marek Jurek and grassroots brokers like Ewa Kowalewska and Lech Kowalewski. This is a “transnational nationalist” space of Catholic far-right solidarity, distinctive in virtue of the primacy of our protagonists’ religious commitments. Jurek, Kowalewska, and Kowalewski became transnational activists *because* the Catholicism driving their pro-life commitments bridged national and transnational spaces of social activism.

Our research therefore both confirms and goes beyond key conclusions of the social-scientific literature on “transnational contention” (Tarrow and McAdam) or “transnational advocacy networks” (Keck and Sikkink) regarding which agents across borders and spaces “mobilize information strategically to help create new issues and categories, and to persuade, pressurize, and gain leverage over much more powerful organizations and governments.”¹²⁶ We have showcased the peculiar entanglement of the national and the transnational in pro-life activism, which we argue must take religious convictions seriously. We have also demonstrated the

¹²³See, for example, Anja Hennig, “The Diverse Catholic Right in Poland,” in Gionathan Lo Mascolo, ed., *The Christian Right in Europe: Movements, Networks, and Denominations* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2023), 75–104.

¹²⁴Compare, for example, Tarrow and McAdam, “Scale Shift in Transnational Contention”; Mark Beissinger, “How Nationalisms Spread: Eastern Europe Adrift the Tides and Cycles of Nationalist Contention,” in Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman, eds., *Nations and Nationalism: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 258–74.

¹²⁵Pasieka, *Living Right*, 5.

¹²⁶Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, “Transnational Advocacy Networks in International and Regional Politics,” *International Social Science Journal* 51 (1999): 89–101, 89–90.

broadier importance of reconstructing the entangled lines of intellectual history and social movement studies to achieve a fuller explanation of transnational “scale shift” encompassing intellectual, political, religious, and social spheres.

Our story of Marek Jurek’s mediation of natalist junta values emphasizes transfers of templates intended among others to validate a model of secular governance understood to be in line with both Thomist natural law and modern Catholic social ethics. Consigning European Christian Democracy to the dustbin of history, Jurek ultimately found a model instead in Pinochet’s Chile. Meanwhile, the U.S. story of the Willkes, Father Marx, and Human Life International involved on-the-ground brokerage: direct transfers of funds, materials, and personnel orchestrated and mediated by Ewa Kowalewska and Lech Kowalewski.

As we see, these very same Polish actors, thirty to forty years on, persist in their advocacies and continue to seek out transnational partners in what they now, in the twenty-first century, perceive to be gender wars with “civilizational” ramifications.¹²⁷ Among these anti-gender, pro-family endeavors, *Roe v. Wade*’s reversal with the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2022 *Dobbs* decision has undoubtedly received the most attention.¹²⁸ Yet, given the activist energy harnessed by the Women’s Strike in 2020, it is clear that Poland remains a salient battleground in this ongoing global struggle, even as the current government of Donald Tusk stalls in its efforts to advance legislation to roll back the Constitutional Tribunal’s cancellation of abortion rights—with additional obstacles in place since the summer of 2025 in the form of the veto power of the newly inaugurated, Law and Justice-backed President Karol Nawrocki.

Marek Jurek, Ewa Kowalewska, and Lech Kowalewski felt themselves above all to be Poles acting on behalf of the biological, and indeed biologically Catholic, Polish nation. Yet they are also part of a global pro-life community that, in the twenty-first century, became the vanguard of “anti-gender” activism. They did not merely import; they engaged in transnational conversations, and they continued (and arguably, still continue) to participate in broad transnational frames. These have ranged from Human Life International, to the European Parliament, to the World Congress of Families and other U.S.-backed global Far Right pro-life projects that have been notching major successes: the 2024 election of J. D. Vance as U.S. Vice President, the 2023 referendum defeat of progressive reforms to the Chilean constitution, and natalist and anti-“genderist” rhetoric from across Central and Eastern Europe (and, even more so, Russia).

Writing from the perspective of 2025, one must not be blind to the urgency of the scholarly task of making sense of the mechanisms and processes underlying shocking news headlines announcing the elimination of a woman’s right to choose or the mass expulsion of migrants deprived of access to due process. After all, these structural forces rest on the shoulders of concrete individuals. More than the populist policy-making of Donald Trump, Giorgia Meloni, or Viktor Orbán, the transnational Far Right is a globalized sphere of social actors rolling up their sleeves to publish widely

¹²⁷ Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk, *Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2022).

¹²⁸ See, for example, Piotr H. Kosicki, “SCOTUS and the Catholic Authoritarian Vanguard,” *Nation*, 20 July 2022; Blandine Chélini-Pont, “La droite religieuse et catholique américaine dans la fabrique d’un ‘national-christianisme’ transatlantique sous Donald Trump,” in Olivier Dard and Bruno Dumons, eds., *Droits et catholicisme en France et en Europe des années 1960 à nos jours* (Lyon: LARHRA, 2021), 255–84.

circulated content, march in the streets, and even go to prison. The fine-grained detail of biography and ethnography, built upward from carefully triangulated national cases, reveals the intellectual and social building blocks of a transnational political agenda.

Understanding pro-life activists on their own terms makes clear the importance of incorporating non-progressive social activism into the post-1989 story of civic and social mobilization. The generations of transnational far-right activists that came to the fore between the 1970s and 1990s forged lateral links and staked a claim to the transnational circulation of ideas and material, in conversation with a global religious context, while balancing distinct local, national, and transnational elements. Pro-life activism is significant on its own terms, but it also holds the key to a new approach to studying transnational advocacy and contention that draws actively on the toolkits of both intellectual history and social movement studies.

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