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Catholicism, Ethnop-Catholics, and the Catholic Church in Modern Poland

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Abstract

In trying to define "Catholicism," I distinguish between three interlocking phenomena: Catholicism, ethno-Catholics, and the Catholic Church (or the doctrine, the community, and the institution). None of these is coterminous with the others, yet they can never be entirely disentangled. Talking about the relationship between them can be extraordinarily difficult. I propose to do so by focusing on two sites of analysis: the doctrinal core of Catholicism (as specified in canonical and authoritative texts), and the moments of controversy or heresy that push the boundaries of the faith. This allows us to see Catholicism as a space for debate and diversity rather than a list of static features, without dissolving the faith into amorphous heterogeneity. To exemplify this approach, I look at the Mariavite controversy in early 20th century Poland, which both challenged and helped specify matters of ecclesiology that in turn clarified some of the limits of Catholicism's conceptual framework.