

Natural Law and Imagined Theocracies at Poland's Collegium Intermarium

By Eliza Fisher



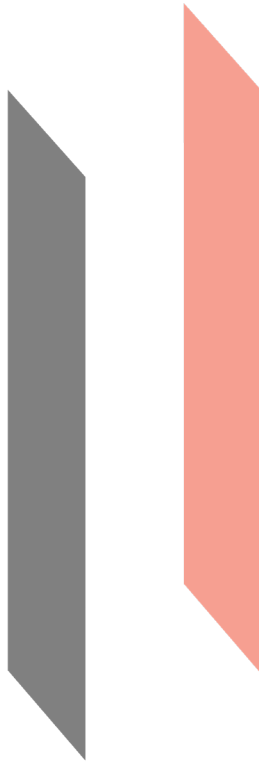
Institute for
European, Russian,
and Eurasian Studies

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

i|liberalism
Studies Program

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1. Q. *Who made the world?*

A. *God made the world.*

2. Q. *Who is God?*

A. *God is the Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things.*

3. Q. *What is man?*

A. *Man is a creature composed of body and soul, made to the image and likeness of God.*

6. Q. *Why did God make you?*

A. *God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him for ever in heaven.*

9. Q. *What must we do to save our souls?*

A. *To save our souls, we must worship God by faith, hope, and charity; that is, we must believe in Him, hope in Him, and love Him with all our heart.*

10. Q. *How shall we know the things which we are to believe?*

A. *We shall know the things which we are to believe from the Catholic Church, through which God speaks to us.*¹

¹ "The Baltimore Catechism," *catechism.cc*. Accessed March 8, 2024. https://www.catechism.cc/catechisms/Baltimore_Catechism.pdf

In late May of 2021, people gathered in a large room in Warsaw's Central Agricultural Library to attend a conference titled *Intermarium: Space of Freedom and Order*. The library grounds have a rich history, having played host to a seventeenth-century Swedish invasion, as well as Russian, Prussian, and Nazi occupations, and even serving as the site of Maria Skłodowska-Curie's early experiments. By hosting an academic conference within this library, Collegium Intermarium, an ultra-Catholic higher educational institution that seeks to transform the European Union (EU) into a conservative Christian confederation, claimed this legacy as its own.²

Collegium Intermarium's name references the geopolitical construct of Intermarium, which is roughly coterminous with Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), including the modern countries of Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Romania, Moldova, Bulgaria, and Slovenia. First launched by Polish statesman Jozef Pilsudski in the early 20th century, Intermarium is an imagined alliance of countries between the Baltic, Black, and Aegean Seas, meant to disrupt great-power manipulations and facilitate Central European regional self-determination. At its inception, Intermarium would have been a buffer zone between Germany and Russia; today, Polish president Andrzej Duda has revived Intermarium as the Three Seas Initiative, a project of economic cooperation between CEE's EU member states meant to reduce the region's reliance on both its Eastern and Western neighbors—Russia and the European Union.³ Far-right Ukrainian nationalists have their own contemporary version of Intermarium, through which they “rehabilitate fascist theories under a narrative... of a white Europe fighting against both immigrants and cosmopolitan elites.”⁴ Soon after Laruelle and Rivera identified this narrative in 2019, participants at the 2021 Intermarium Conference presented the region in precisely the same context.

At the conference, international judges and statesmen gathered, together with alt-right pundits and influential conservative academics, to celebrate the inauguration of Collegium Intermarium, a conservative, Catholic law school seeking to effect radical social change through legal and academic influence. During the conference's eight hours, former president of the Czech Republic Vaclav Klaus, warned of “the new progressivist ideology... controlling and dominating today's world,” against which he declaimed, speaking both for the Intermarium region and for Europe as a whole, that “we don't want to erase our borders and get rid of the distinction between a citizen and a foreigner.”⁵ European MP Erno Schaller-Baross similarly described “the clash of two worlds in the European arena,” between liberal and conservative forces: “I think it's needless to say,” he added, “on which side our countries with an extensive [Judeo-Christian] heritage have to stand.”⁶ The dubiously self-styled Princess Doctor Ingrid Detter de Frankopan went so far as to assert, “I will see Intermarium as a chance to be a mega-anti-woke organization, that puts down all these twits who think that gender doesn't matter.”⁷

2 Alicja Curanović, “The International Activity of Ordo Iuris. The Central European Actor and the Global Christian Right,” *Religions* 12, no. 12 (Politicization of Religion from a Global Perspective, 2021): 1038. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12121038>.

3 Belarus is not an EU member country and is thus not affiliated with the Three Seas Initiative (TSI); Ukraine and Moldova became affiliated with the TSI in September of 2023, but have not yet formally acceded to the EU or the TSI.

4 Marlene Laruelle and Ellen Rivera, “Imagined Geographies of Central and Eastern Europe: The Concept of Intermarium,” *IERES Occasional Papers* no. 1 (2019): 27.

5 Klaus, Intermarium Conference, 5:53:31, 6:11:43.

6 Schaller-Baross, Intermarium Conference, 7:57:56-7:58:53.

7 Detter de Frankopan, Intermarium Conference, 8:14:30.



Figure 1: Three Seas Initiative/Intermarium⁸

21st-century conservatives from CEE and the Western world have seized upon the idea of Intermarium as a vehicle for anti-progressive co-belligerence.⁹ Hungary and Poland's authoritarian turns in recent years have provided fertile ground for religious conservatives to manipulate democratic processes. Collegium Intermarium's parent organization, the conservative Catholic legal think tank Ordo Iuris, has been instrumental in this process, linking Central European conservatism to the vast network of the Global Christian Right (GCR). The GCR is massive and multivalent, but its constituents are constantly recreating the same narrative structure across time and culture. By presenting extreme understandings of privilege, power, and identity as transcendental truths rather than critically considering them in their historical contexts, the GCR attracts individuals who feel dispossessed, disenfranchised, and devalued within homelands they believe should be purely their own. At the Intermarium Conference, CEE religious conservatives attempted to exploit regional anxieties around modernization and Central Europe's place in the global geopolitical order to present Collegium Intermarium as a solution to these fears.

Any complete discussion of contemporary Central and Eastern European politics must include the relatively new concept of political illiberalism, an "ideological universe" that defines itself in oppositional and inherently reactive relation to diverse modern liberalism by proposing realities that are "majoritarian, nation-centric, or sovereigntist, favoring traditional hierarchies and cultural homogeneity."¹⁰ Illiberal efforts in Central and Eastern Europe serve both regional and international conservative goals. For CEE conservatives, their region's transformation into an illiberal homeland is a goal in itself, a restoration of the natural order. For international actors, the region presents a relatively less democratically entrenched version of Europe, ripe for GCR actors to expand their influence and solidify effective narratives. Key parties in Poland and Hungary are the rising stars of modern CEE illiberalism, which is markedly Western and consistently Eurosceptical. Both countries have enjoyed

8 Calus, Kamil, Horia Ciurtin, and Gheorghe Magheru, "The emergence of a European project. Three Summits for the Three Seas Initiatives," ed. Izel Selin. June 2018, New Strategy Centre and OSW (Centre for Eastern Studies), https://newstrategycenter.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/NSC_OSW_3SI_policy_paper.pdf.

9 The term "co-belligerence" means something close to "collaboration," but more specifically denotes the joining of imperfectly aligned forces against a common enemy as a temporary collaboration to achieve a shared goal. In this work, I use the term "co-belligerence" to characterize an increasingly popular behavior of adept collaboration between GCR factions to achieve mutually desired results, even when factions' reasons for desiring that result may differ.

10 Marlene Laruelle, "Illiberalism: a conceptual introduction," *East European Politics* 38, no. 2 (2022): 303–327. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2022.2037079>.

relative regional success in adapting to democracy after the fall of the Soviet Union, partially due to their EU member status; as members of the economically powerful Visegrád Group, they were among the first post-communist countries to join the EU and are highly active in international trade. As such, challenges to EU hegemony from CEE illiberals are measured, testing the limits of national independence within the EU framework rather than openly rejecting it. Rejecting anything European goes against the narrative that illiberal actors are constructing in the region—instead, CEE illiberals seize on pre-existing national political myths, which characterize Poland and Hungary as European Christian nations victimized by corrupt great powers.

GCR actors in Central Europe blend Christian epistemology and national populism in their rhetoric, producing narratives of regional exceptionalism that rely on Christian dogma to present Central Europe as destined to save the European Union from corrupt liberalism. The Polish GCR, predictably, grounds its arguments in Catholic doctrine, and its representatives demonstrated this at the conference; however, other conference participants from Central Europe set aside denominational differences to develop a shared narrative that, while rooted in Catholic theology, engaged broadly Christian and conservative rhetoric to reinforce conference claims. The conference's narrative was largely reliant on the existence of a natural order in which all things are either good or evil, and speakers used this basis to identify individuals and groups violating the natural order, whom they branded as evil. The panelists demonstrated a conception of natural order coterminous with contemporary bigotries, accusing feminists and queer activists of poisoning Western society. They asserted that a conservative response was necessary, framing it as a battle for the fate of Western civilization in which Central European conservatives would lead the forces of good against corrupt liberal leaders and groups that violate the natural order. The conference narrative presented two potential futures contingent on the outcome of the impending war. If the forces of evil win, one panelist claimed, “[that] is going to be the real end of civilization.”¹¹ If the forces of good win, Europe would remain, or return to, a conservative Christian continent devoid of the malign influences that have ideologically poisoned the West. Panelists positioned liberalism as an ideological heir to communism and the LGBTQ+ community as another Nazi regime, both of which Intermarium has the potential and thus the moral responsibility to overthrow.

Contextualizing the Intermarium Conference is inherently an interdisciplinary task; I use political theology and rhetorical analysis as guiding frameworks to weave together intellectual history, legal scholarship, and anthropologically informed geopolitical analysis. I have found it valuable to supplement my academic bibliography with contemporary voices from independent CEE media. This volume would be incomplete without the expertise of these journalists and reporters, who have dedicated their careers to examining and analyzing *Ordo Iuris* and GCR activity in the region. Their work provides an important counterpart to the Intermarium Conference narrative: where conference participants have projected Central Europe as an independent, conservative stronghold of traditional morality, journalists document widespread civil protests against illiberal leadership and uncover chains of clandestine foreign influence in government. This volume follows that path and seeks not to evaluate the validity of truth claims made at the Intermarium Conference but to place the conference in sufficient context to analyze its rhetorical content.

The first chapter examines the historical basis of the conference's underlying truth claims. During the conference, participants frequently asserted the existence of a natural order, which they used to justify Catholic nationalist rhetoric in support of legal discrimination against minority communities. The second chapter situates these truth claims in their geopolitical context, drawing key details from Central European history and contemporary politics to illustrate a history of interaction between GCR rhetoric and Central European nationalist ideologies, including *Ordo Iuris*'s' interaction origins as an overseas outpost of a near-defunct monarchist cult. The final chapter addresses the four central panels of the Intermarium Conference itself. Each hour-long panel contributed to the conference's overall narrative, as speakers enumerated the moral failures of contemporary Western society that they believed *Collegium Intermarium* could supposedly correct. Beyond its significance as a standalone event, the Intermarium Conference provides a rhetorical model for future attempts to blend national political myths with prescriptive traditional morality and exemplifies the forward-looking character of GCR activity in Central Europe. By socially and historically contextualizing the truth claims and rhetorical mechanisms advanced by the conference participants, this work argues that the Intermarium Conference represents a concerted international conservative effort to repackaging GCR rhetoric as Central European populist chauvinism.

¹¹ Majchrowski, Intermarium Conference, 09:24:26.

In this chapter, I describe three central narratives of the Intermarium Conference, which I title “Natural Order,” “True Europe,” and “Gender Ideology.” Each of these three narratives engages ontological debates around identity, belonging, and order, which they place in the context of 21st-century anxieties around immigration, gender, and human rights. The “natural order” narrative, grounded in Thomistic natural law theory, drives contemporary religious conservative rhetorical tactics in both the legal and metapolitical spheres, as GCR actors argue that upholding conservative Christian morality structures preserves a natural order that must not be disrupted. This narrative then extends into the civil sphere through the “true Europe” and “gender ideology” narratives, which respectively posit that European identity is defined by adherence to the natural order and that failing to maintain a strictly binary, complementary conception of gender violates it.

This chapter naturally includes a discussion of conservative political activities across both time and space. GCR rhetoric has benefitted from Christianity’s substantial influence on modern society, though GCR representatives often approach the subject through a zero-sum narrative in which any increase in quantifiable (or unquantifiable) “Christianity-in-the-world” is positive, and any decrease is negative. While a modern historian might argue that Christianity’s global presence is due to centuries of efforts by Christian organizations to expand their influence, GCR actors, including *Ordo Iuris*’ intellectual forefather, invert the narrative, suggesting instead that idyllic Christendom was the result of the natural order being allowed to play out, and that the long path from the Protestant Reformation onward has been nothing more than a chain of successively more extreme violations of the natural order.¹ For the GCR, the present is always the worst it has ever been—which handily justifies taking any and all measures to defend the faith that GCR actors claim is endangered. Contemporary conservatives do not eschew cooperation across national, continental, and even, surprisingly, religious boundaries. When studying the GCR, no two actors can be dismissed as unlikely bedfellows. Co-belligerence has been one of the GCR’s greatest assets in the modern world, as international conservatives share legal and rhetorical tactics to achieve shared goals. Similarly, GCR actors often reach across time to retroactively claim national, regional, and continental heroes as forerunners or spiritual forefathers to their own modern culture wars. At the same time, they frequently and contradictorily cast contemporary enemies as universal villains, accusing them of violating the natural order and maliciously infiltrating “true European” societies with the aim of destroying thousands of years’ worth of culture and history. GCR actors present a vision of a world where conservatives are beset by enemies on all sides, freedom of speech and thought are threatened, and the queer-Communist specter of “cultural Marxism” is constantly on the cusp of victory. These conservatives, then, cast themselves as heroes, the last protectors of the “true Europe” as it is assailed by enemies.

“Natural Order”

Since its 13th-century inception, the “natural order” narrative has consistently been used to support normative claims about human behavior and morality. Premised on Catholic dogma, which presupposes the existence of a perfect, supreme God, the narrative relies on the purported existence of a natural order backed by natural law. Within this paradigm, certain beliefs and behaviors are labeled inherently destructive by the sole virtue of being assigned a negative moral value, regardless of the presence or absence of demonstrable effects. Over the centuries, the notion of a “natural order” has underpinned justifications for colonization, mass enslavement, and forced conversion; today, it has been wielded

¹ Neil Datta, “Modern Day Crusaders in Europe. Tradition, family and property: Analysis of a transnational, ultra-conservative, Catholic-inspired influence network.” *epfweb.org*, 8. https://www.epfweb.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Modern%20Day%20Crusaders%20in%20Europe%20-%20TFP%20Report_1.pdf.

to support regressive actions like homophobic legislation, as global conservatives deploy the “natural order” narrative in support of their “culture wars” against liberalism and its representatives.²

Thomas Aquinas “is generally regarded as the West’s preeminent theorist of the natural law,” and his *Summa Theologica* “sets the terms of debate for subsequent natural law theorizing.”³ Aquinas saw God as the giver of natural law, humankind as the recipient, and rational thought and consequent action as indivisible from the dictates of natural law. Contemporary GCR narratives commonly rely on extreme interpretations of Aquinas’ thought, overextending assertions of God’s existence and the rightful social place of the Catholic Church. Where “natural law” is legally understood as a “set of universal truths, principles, and rules that properly govern human moral conduct... pre-existing and *discovered through human reason and rational analysis*,” in GCR narratives, to accept Aquinas’ terms is to affirm God’s existence and primacy.⁴ Even in ostensibly secular modern legal systems, natural law theory is “not only compatible with contemporary analytic philosophy and jurisprudence but foundational with respect to the natural rights that define the liberal tradition.”⁵ Following Aquinas, natural law theory asserts that for human laws to be valid, they must align with natural law; similarly, per the Catholic Catechism, “regimes whose nature is contrary to the natural law... cannot achieve the common good of the nations on which they have been imposed.”⁶ For GCR actors, Christian morality serves as a divinely promulgated set of behavioral guidelines; thus, human laws must be directed at orienting individual and societal human trajectories towards Christian, or specifically Catholic, social dominance.

Lawyers and human rights organizations in the 21st century have begun practicing “cause lawyering” beyond their national borders to achieve social goals both at home and abroad.⁷ In response, GCR actors have used natural law theory to attack their legislative efforts aimed at liberalizing abortion access, universalizing non-heterosexual marriage rights, and legally recognizing non-cisgender identities on the grounds that these behaviors violate divine directives set for humanity. This practice contributes to the totality of the GCR’s mission to not only oppose the spread of global secularism but to perpetuate “an orthodox Christian vision [of what is natural] and a defense of the traditional nuclear family formation.”⁸

Many participants at the Intermarium Conference were representatives of the GCR’s ultra-conservative traditional Catholic faction, linking *Ordo Iuris* and *Collegium Intermarium* to the schismatic Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX), which the Southern Poverty Law Center has called “the powerhouse organization of the radical traditionalist Catholic world... all of whose priests were excommunicated in the late 1980s.”⁹ Speakers at the Intermarium Conference have collaborated with SSPX offshoot organizations, including the French *Academia Christiana*—which “attempts to fuse... individuals with a monarchist, neofascist, and religious fundamentalist background... into one Christofascist movement”—and its affiliated journal, *The European Conservative*, which recently shifted from a broadly European nationalist stance to serving as a Fidesz media platform that promotes GCR academics and opinionists.¹⁰ These groups and their constituents have vocally supported efforts to instate a strict social hierarchy that positions aristocratic leadership and conservative ideologues as the herald-priests of the new era. Less common, though nonetheless prevalent, have been explicit calls for the establishment of a second Holy Roman Empire or similar structure that would function as its geopolitical equivalent, such as “Christendom” or “Hesperial Europe.”¹¹ Thus, underlying GCR actors’ arguments for contemporary global Christian conservatism is a conceptual foundation rooted in humanist, pre-Christian, and Aristotelian thought structures.

2 See “A Universal Discourse,” 11-45 in Lise Noël’s *Intolerance: The Parameters of Oppression*, trans. Arnold Bennett (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996). Accessed October 7, 2024.

3 Thomas D’Andrea, “The Natural Law Theory of Thomas Aquinas,” *Public Discourse*, August 22, 2021. <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2021/08/77294/>.

4 “Natural law,” Cornell Law School Legal Information Institute. Accessed March 8, 2024. <https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/natural-law/>; emphasis my own.

5 S. Adam Seagrave, “Cicero, Aquinas, and Contemporary Issues in Natural Law Theory,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 62, no. 3 (2009): 491–523. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40387823>.

6 “Participation in Social Life,” Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd. ed. https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENGO015/_P6J.HTM

7 See Clifford Bob’s *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

8 Doris Buss and Didi Herman, 2003, in Curanović, “The International Activity of *Ordo Iuris*.”

9 Heidi Beirich, “Radical powerhouse,” *Southern Poverty Law Center Intelligence Report*, 2015. Accessed March 8, 2024. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2015/radical-powerhouse>.

10 Ellen Rivera, “Academia Christiana: a Marriage of the Catholic and the Extreme Right,” *IJERES Occasional Papers* 18, February 2024. <https://www.illiberalism.org/academia-christiana-a-marriage-of-the-catholic-and-the-extreme-right/>

11 Scott B. Nelson, “Toward a Renewal of Europe,” Kirk Center, last modified July 5, 2020. <https://kirkcenter.org/reviews/toward-a-renewal-of-europe/>

Natural Law: From Aristotle to Aquinas

Contemporary natural law theory is inherently teleological, positing that things in the world are defined not merely by the fact of their existence but by the causes they serve. In developing his Christian theory of natural law, Aquinas blended agnostic Aristotelian logic with Catholic doctrine to produce a qualitatively transformed understanding of Aristotle's object and human teleology in which humanity is defined by its orientation towards God. GCR actors commonly ground truth claims in Aquinas' version of Aristotelian thought, which validates the primacy of divine revelation as the highest form of knowledge transmission, as opposed to revelation of knowledge through individual lived experience. The "natural order" narrative relies on this Thomistic logic, presenting the natural order as divinely revealed and arguing that it cannot be challenged and must be enforced precisely because of its revelation. Likewise, the natural law notion of an object's "purpose" (*telos*) is viewed as deterministic within Thomistic interpretation. Thus, Aquinas' resulting argument structure is ideally suited for GCR rhetoric because it models the adaptation, or conversion, of non-Christian logic to the Catholic paradigm.

While Aristotle's theory of natural law is descriptive, Aquinas' iteration is prescriptive, reinterpreting the term "natural" not to descriptively reference material examples in nature but to validate an object's existence in particular forms as the will of God as creator. Within this thought structure, then, nature itself can be unnatural when it departs from the divine order. Aristotle's original thought, though, was far more exploratory in nature:

How comes it, for instance, that we have a "saw" here before us? (1) Because (material *aitia*) there existed suitable MATERIAL (iron, to wit) out of which to make it. (2) Because (formal *aitia*) the iron was given the FORM (i.e., distinguishing attributes) of a saw. (3) Because (efficient *aitia*) a voluntary AGENT (the smith, with suitable apparatus and accessories) chose to make the iron into a saw. (4) Because (final *aitia*) the END aimed at was to create a tool able to perform a useful function, i.e., dividing wood by a particular method.¹²

Though clearly teleological, Aristotle's concept of the four causes makes no concessions to humanity-as-object, subject to and shaped by a divine or natural will—to Aristotle, humanity is the creator through whose efforts objects take form. In Thomistic natural law theory, however, humanity shifts from creator to created, with God as Creator and humanity as object, resulting in a logic structure within which Catholicism is, inarguably, humanity's natural state, and humanity is subject to the forces of its creation.

Within the Thomistic natural law theory paradigm, "belief in natural law is inseparable from the idea of nature as a realm shaped by final causes, oriented in their totality towards a single transcendent moral Good"—in other words, all final causes are oriented towards God.¹³ The concept of the cause is Aristotle's greatest contribution to Thomistic logic. The four causes enforce a more restrictive understanding of what is acceptable within the natural law paradigm, determining which behaviors, which ways of life, and which forms of government are in harmony with the natural order. For conservative Christian political theology, the four causes provide a more detailed description of the "proper" form of government under the natural law paradigm. Arguments grounded in natural law theory are functionally inarguable without rejecting the fundamental premise of natural law theory, as "[t]he positing of an abiding criterion that exists outside of time or place leaves no room for argumentation; instead, there is simply validity or nonvalidity."¹⁴ Whatever form of government is said to best fulfill the purposes of government and politics, as set out by natural law, is presented as unquestionably superior within the natural law paradigm.

To both Aristotle and Aquinas, the purpose of politics is directed at the common good. Aristotle's conception of the common good was, characteristically, humanistic: "The main concern of politics is to engender a certain character in the citizens and to make them good and disposed to perform noble actions."¹⁵ To Aquinas, "God, the Supreme Being and the source of all other being, is consequently the

¹² Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. P. H. Wicksteed and E. M. Cornford, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957). <https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.aristotle-physics.1957>

¹³ David Bentley Hart, "Is, Ought, and Nature's Laws," *First Things*, March 2013. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2013/03/is-ought-and-natures-laws>

¹⁴ Francis J. Mootz III, "Perelman's Theory of Argumentation and Natural Law," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 43, no. 4 (2010): 38e. <https://doi.org/10.5325/philrhet.43.4.0383>.

¹⁵ "Aristotle: Politics," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Accessed March 8, 2024. <https://iep.utm.edu/aristotle-politics/>

Supreme Good, and the goodness of creatures results from the diffusion of His goodness,” meaning that orientation towards God is inextricably part of the common good.¹⁶ With this reorientation towards the Catholic God as the supreme good, Aquinas constructed a paradigm in which the purpose of government is to promote and enforce natural law, and within which any government, to be valid, must be Catholic.

Following Aquinas’ understanding of human law, modern natural law theory reflects a particularly conservative Christian morality structure that directs humanity to: “1. Protect and preserve human life. 2. Reproduce and educate one’s offspring. 3. Know and worship God,” directives which have functionally been interpreted to condemn abortion, expressions of queer identities, agnosticism, atheism, and promotion of gender equality.¹⁷ For example, law-based arguments for criminalizing homosexuality assume that procreation is the central purpose of marriage and thus proscribe marriages that preclude monogamous procreation.

According to GCR logic, “denying gender essentialism questions the creative wisdom manifested in God’s creating one as a man or as a woman, [resulting in] something like the sin of ingratitude or spitefulness,” and those validating queer identity are considered disconnected from “truth, which is coextensive with the [Church’s] position” on gender identity and sexual preference.¹⁸ Within this logical structure, the acknowledgment of queer identity is seen as *not* functioning under conditions of truth and is presented as needing corrective guidance by individuals or powers who *do* understand the truth, ensuring that those under their purview do not deviate from it. The result is a moral justification for intervention, framed in GCR arguments as a moral imperative—with knowledge of purported truths about identity and reality comes a responsibility to set the errant straight; failure to address deviation from behavior consistent with natural law constitutes neglect. Though this authoritarian framework appears implicitly in GCR rhetoric, it is rarely voiced openly; instead, many GCR actors have adopted the language of human rights to perpetuate natural law theory.

Natural Law, Human Rights, and Human Dignity

With the advent of secular international governance structures, Christian thought structures are no longer unquestionably dominant. To maintain their social influence, religious institutions have found themselves increasingly engaging in human rights discourse as human rights have become a mainstay of international political and social processes. In 1998, Henkin observed that while religions “see their moral code as part of a total cosmic order and as emanating from a Supreme Legislator,” the human rights framework “has rooted itself entirely in human dignity and finds its complete justification in that idea... The human rights idea itself does not posit any religious basis for human dignity.”¹⁹ Given the significant shifts towards secularism in contemporary human rights discourse, it is unsurprising that institutions reliant on a Thomistic conception of natural law have had to develop new tactics for engagement. Today, even more liberal religious institutions involved in contemporary human rights discourse often fall short in their progressive engagement with gender issues.

The Catholic Church is the single largest transnational religious actor in contemporary human rights discourse.²⁰ In 2005, Catholic theologian Fr. David Hollenbach stated that “the church’s work in support of human rights is essentially connected to its mission to proclaim the Gospel,” explicitly affirming that the Church’s efforts in this regard serve to further their own objectives.²¹ This has remained true, and the Church has allied with the GC in the process. In 2018, for example, the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by co-hosting an event with the GCR powerhouse organization Alliance Defending Freedom International.²²

16 “Good,” Catholic Encyclopedia, *newadvent.org*. Accessed March 8, 2024. <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06636b.htm>.

17 Mark Dimmock and Andrew Fisher, “Aquinas’ Natural Law Theory,” in *Ethics for A-Levels*, Open Book Publishers, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0125>

18 Craig A. Ford, “Transgender bodies, Catholic schools, and a Queer Natural Law Theology of Exploration,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 7, No. 1 (2018).

19 Louis Henkin, “Religion, religions, and human rights,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 26, no. 2 (1998): 229-239. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40008655>

20 Jodok Troy, “The Papal Human Rights Discourse: The Difference Pope Francis Makes,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2019): 66-90. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2019.0003>

21 Fr. Benjamin J. Urmston, “Peace and Justice - Human Rights in Catholic Thought,” Xavier University, *xavier.edu*, April 2014. <https://www.xavier.edu/frben/human-right>

22 Anna Fata, “70 Years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” Holy See, *holysemission.org*, December 4, 2018. <https://holysemission.org/contents/events/5c255a6e9b51e.php>

In recent years, an international movement known as Catholic integralism has risen to prominence in the GCR. Integralist rhetoric opposes key tenets of progressive arguments on human rights, making paternalistic claims to superior knowledge of human nature and natural law. The movement has attracted conservative thinkers with calls to infuse global society with conservative morality, drawing on the Thomistic natural law paradigm and natural law legal theory to argue for pronounced moral conservatism and strong Catholic influence in government and society.

Catholic Integralism

In the 2010s, Catholic integralism began gaining ground within the GCR as a new strand of thought that opposed liberalism wholesale, countering liberal investments in human rights and freedoms with the claim that the main purpose of government is to guide humanity to its best ends. Rooted in a long tradition of tension between the Church and the State as a ruling dyarchy, Catholic integralism maintains that all forms of government should function according to Catholic precepts. Per the Catholic integralist playbook, the separation of church and state was a mistake. Catholic integralists believe not only that the church and state should cooperate in all things but that when the church “need[s] help achieving its mission... [the state] must enact policy and impose civil penalties.”²³

In his 2023 book *All the Kingdoms of the World*, author Kevin Vallier summarizes the Catholic integralist narrative, in which liberalism is the latest and greatest enemy of the Catholic Church, the common good, and the future of humanity:

The Church has faced many enemies in its two millennia—the great heretics, Islam, persecution, and schism—but a new calamity befell the Church in the sixteenth century: the Protestant Reformation... Dark secular ideologies poured forth from the new cracks in Christendom. The most virulent of these is socialism. The socialist seeks to transform the individual into a truly social being—one free from sin, hierarchy, and domination, who will join with others to create a new economic system organized cooperatively and planned scientifically. Socialist movements sought to liberate people from organized religion, Catholicism above all... Socialism, however, has two weaknesses. Its unworkability is manifest and its opposition to the Church unmistakable... As soon as socialism reared its head, its days were numbered. It flourished for a few decades, killed millions, and died. The elder child of the Reformation still lives, however, more patient and strategic than its little brother. Today, it governs much of the world. It has even infiltrated the Church. Its name is *liberalism*—the most successful enemy of the Church in its history.²⁴

As Vallier demonstrates, Catholic integralist narratives tend to demonize liberalism and secularism, accusing their ideologies and representatives of targeting peaceful Christians and their beliefs and working to eradicate Christianity.

The coals of Catholic integralism began to smolder in 2012 with a lecture in Austria by British philosopher Thomas Pink, as part of his effort to redefine a controversial 1965 Church document, *Dignitatis humanae*, which supported a degree of individual religious liberty that some Catholics considered a threat to the Church’s social dominance. Pink’s lecture inspired a young Cistercian monk named Edmund Waldstein, who will return in greater importance in the following section, to help create a Facebook group, which became a private chat, which became a public blog, made up of illiberal Catholics from across the world, including several participants at the Internarium Conference.²⁵ The American wing of the integralist movement split in 2016 over the Trump candidacy; some members saw Trump as “repulsive—everything a Catholic should oppose,” while others saw him as “a new Constantine[,] prepared to remake a pagan empire into a Christian one.”²⁶ The same year, Harvard professor emeritus of constitutional law Adrian Vermeule became the primary intellectual strategist for Catholic integralism in the U.S., nearly coincident with his conversion to Catholicism. Vermeule has consistently propagated metapolitical narratives supporting the Catholic domination of society, arguing that “Christians should... build strong religious communities to resist liberal elites. To protect

²³ Kevin Vallier, *All the Kingdoms of the World: On Radical Religious Alternatives to Liberalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/os0/9780197611371.003.0002>

²⁴ Vallier, *All the Kingdoms of the World*.

²⁵ Vallier, *All the Kingdoms of the World*.

²⁶ Vallier, *All the Kingdoms of the World*.

these communities, though, Catholics must dominate political life. They must take over the state and destroy liberalism from the top down, not so much with coercion but with other forms of persuasion and soft power.”²⁷

In 2021, Edmund Waldstein, who was by then a leading Catholic integralist, participated in an article series organized by the interdenominational American Theopolis Institute, a Christian conservative forum that “perpetuates [a creationist, theocratic] agenda of church reformation and cultural transformation.”²⁸ Waldstein’s contribution to the series, an article titled “The Four Causes of Political Community,” concluded that the most proper forms of government for the contemporary world are nationalist, hierarchical, and Catholic.²⁹ The article indicates potential points of conflict in future GCR endeavors as Waldstein responds to and challenges assertions made by other authors in the series. The central issue to note for analysis of GCR futures is that Waldstein, as a representative of Catholic integralism, invalidates other Christian denominations as potential religious foundations for a valid society. Waldstein highlights the pursuit of the common good and virtuous action as the defining acts of political citizenship. “The task of politics,” he concludes, “is to foster the greatest possible virtue in the greatest possible harmony—a harmony great not only in the consonance of voice with voice but also in the number of voices united.”³⁰ His proposed political communities, which are homogeneous in population and explicitly not liberal, would serve their purpose by bringing the most believers to the Catholic Church. Waldstein does not use the term “illiberal” in the article, but his calls for worldwide submission to spiritual authority and categorical disavowal of liberalism indicate that, in his estimation, governments exist to impose illiberal Catholicism on their subjects, and humans exist to be illiberal Catholics.

Waldstein is not a particularly extreme thinker within the Catholic integralist movement or within the GCR. His article provides a uniquely simple, explicit illustration of the world that conservative Catholic actors like *Ordo Iuris* and *Collegium Intermarium* idealize, a vision that has emerged in several different contexts around the world. In 2020, for instance, liberal Finnish religious scholar Risto Saarinen identified the deeply Catholic, recently illiberal Poland as integralism’s European stronghold and integralism itself as an “ambitious and consistent nationalist ideology... [that] might work in Poland.”³¹ Waldstein’s article only strengthened Saarinen’s claim: on the topic of political alliances on the way to Catholic domination, Waldstein approved of “siding with... conservative nationalists in Poland against globalist liberals on the issues of abortion and homosexuality.”³²

GCR actors are generally quick to decry liberalism, globalism, and overly involved government, but clear discussions of what forms of government they *do* prefer come few and far between. Waldstein’s discussion included a significant number of GCR talking points— he criticized globalism, endorsed the principle of subsidiarity, and identified gender as a central cultural battleground— and, importantly, he connected them clearly to his calls for worldwide theocracy, providing a fairly undeniable example of what GCR representatives may have meant when they spoke of the ways in which *Collegium Intermarium* or the GCR will impact Europe and the world. The article raises other questions: if a “proper” political community is fit to the customs and culture of its populace, what is the “right” populace for Waldstein’s imagined political community? Several different strands of conservative thought have converged to provide a compelling answer, in the form of an idea: a world transformed by a return to its real and imagined roots, largely revolving around the narrative of a “true Europe.”

“True Europe”

The “true Europe” narrative applies the natural order paradigm to European society, imagining that Europe is characterized by a specific set of traits and that any version of Europe not exclusively embodying those traits is not the true Europe and must be corrected. As such, proponents of the narrative habitually identify features and facets of contemporary European society and politics that they assert are features representative of a “false Europe,” which is presented as existing in violation of

²⁷ Vallier, *All the Kingdoms of the World*.

²⁸ “Our mission,” *Theopolis*. <https://theopolisinstitute.com/our-mission/>; “About,” *Biblical Horizons*, <https://www.biblicalhorizons.com/about/biblicalhorizons/>. Accessed November 4, 2024. Theopolis’ cofounder has also described the role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons* as “an introduction to evil.”

²⁹ Edmund Waldstein, “The Four Causes of Political Community,” *Theopolis*, February 18, 2021. <https://theopolisinstitute.com/conversations/the-four-causes-of-political-community/>

³⁰ Waldstein, “The Four Causes of Political Community.”

³¹ Risto Saarinen, “Populists, Identitarians, and Integralists: Varieties of Christian Political Conservatism Today,” *Interkulturelle Theologie* 46, no. 2 (2020): 349-363.

³² Waldstein, “The Four Causes of Political Community.”

the natural order, while the “true Europe” would instead uphold the natural order. In more palatable presentations, its supporters describe “true Europe” simply as a federation of subsidiary states in which every community makes its own rules and eschew any further clarification. In its most xenophobic form, “true Europe” is populated with white people, structured into heterosexual families, who are, in turn, organized into towns, cities, regions, and countries. These larger units possess distinct, though uniformly conservative, national or ethnic cultures that may be mutually appreciated but are nonetheless unique and guided by a variety of closely related lifestyles. At the Intermarium Conference, as with most GCR narratives, “true Europe” is also inherently Christian.³³

The “true Europe” narrative is, perhaps predictably, reliant on the idea that there is a “true” Europe—that “Europe” has a clear definition, indelible boundaries, and a specific set of identifying traits. This is, of course, more a fairytale than a historical truth—more than anything else, “Europe is a concept that becomes meaningful in relation to its specific... context.”³⁴ Europe has long been defined by exclusion in its own cultural myth, and European chauvinism radiates judgment in all directions. It is the spread and consolidation of Western Christianity, primarily under the Catholic Church, that shapes today’s idea of historical Europe—Huntington’s famous, now-oversimplified *Clash of Civilizations* model divides Europeans, characterized by affiliation with Western Christianity, from peoples considered “generally less advanced economically... much less likely to develop stable democratic political systems.”³⁵

The social and religious upheaval of the early modern period put the Catholic Church on the defensive as denominations diversified and philosophers imagined thought structures that functioned outside the Catholic paradigm. Europe became increasingly more fragmented with the birth of the nation-state, and the continued construction of a unified European identity became more and more challenging with the development of nationalist ideologies. In the face of increasing atomization, European leaders sought to revive a broader European consciousness. The easiest way to achieve this was by harkening back to old European myths of cultural superiority. The new Europe might not be one people, but it could be a federation of peoples who were suitably civilized and democratic to justify continued colonization and forced assimilation, filtered through the new language of rationalism.

While continental narratives of cultural superiority presented European nation-states as broadly democratic and conflict-averse, individual nation-states were simultaneously developing their own narratives of national and cultural superiority. These narratives presented an idealized story of the nation and of European development as nationally specific: “Cultural roots were invented or rediscovered by reference to Christianity and Europe, and [national] historical trajectories were connected to a real or mythical European past.”³⁶ Throughout the 20th century, nationalist narratives justified invasions, colonialism, and interstate wars, behaviors that challenged the prevailing European self-conception as a democratic and developed society or continent.

Today, European populist politicians continue to employ nationalist narratives to construct mythicized notions of Europe’s past. These narratives selectively frame and interpret events, playing on contemporary insecurities and dissatisfactions about economic disenfranchisement and social anomie to suggest that modernizing forces in European history are to blame for the negative aspects of contemporary life. Where nationalism and populism intersect, politicians mobilize these narratives to accuse liberal actors of destroying European culture.

The French New Right and its Contemporary Progenies

The “true Europe” narrative weaves together multiple threads of modern alt-right thought, heavily featuring the French New Right of the late 1960s and the Identitarian movement of the 2010s, though Catholic integralism also bears consideration. These movements share an anti-globalist, anti-individualist orientation, a potential for anti-immigration sentiment, and a focus on the “true Europe” as reflecting the “natural order.” The “true Europe” narrative is often gender-essentialist and heteronormative, with the “true European” populace defined by the exclusive presence of “traditional families.” An unstated, though often implied, prescriptive claim of the narrative is that local, regional, and national structures of power should encourage this gendered sexual conformity.

³³ I will shortly explore the worldview of pagan philosopher Alain de Benoist, who has contributed significantly to the non-Christian notion of a “true Europe.”

³⁴ Anna Triandafyllidou and Ruby Gropas. *What Is Europe?* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2023), 3.

³⁵ Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22–49. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20045621>

³⁶ Triandafyllidou and Gropas, 35.

Modern French philosopher Alain de Benoist and the French New Right that he created paved the way for Identitarianism's rise to prominence, and its subsequent influence in mainstreaming the "true Europe" narrative. De Benoist, a prolific writer, pagan, and avowed critic of mainstream conservatism, differentiates himself from his fellow thinkers on the right by a measure of balance. De Benoist has explicitly criticized "what he calls 'the pathology of identity'—the political use of identity which often leads the populist Right to focus exclusively on 'us versus them' policies."³⁷ He is anti-immigration, not on the grounds that non-European populations are inferior to Europeans, but on the grounds of his "ethnopluralist" philosophy, which holds that "there is no superior race. All races are superior, and each of them has its own genius."³⁸ Today's Identitarians have entirely adopted the philosophy, which they voice as "the idea that different ethnic groups are equal but ought to live in separation from one another."³⁹ De Benoist, who relies on "race science" to delineate ethnic groups and biological races, insists that he does not perceive inequalities between ostensibly distinct groups, even as he argues for communities based on sameness and genetic difference as a valid means of organization. This notion of ethnopluralism has become a powerful tool for members of the GCR to argue that the principle of subsidiarity, properly realized, can only result in ethnically homogeneous communities.⁴⁰ De Benoist's work has achieved widespread influence in the Western world, inspiring figures such as Alexander Dugin in Russia and alt-right thinkers across the United States and Europe, most notably the Identitarians.⁴¹

Identitarianism, which developed in France in the early 21st century, is a movement that is homophobic, misogynistic, xenophobic, and largely metapolitical in nature, aiming to attract media attention to mainstream extreme views.⁴² The movement's tendency towards Islamophobia belies its reactionary quality—it is, in large part, a response to the European immigration crisis that has, to some extent, characterized the 21st century. Identitarianism differs from its counterpart, Catholic integralism, in that the movement lacks both explicit and even implicit religious affiliation. Instead, Identitarianism treats white racial identity as sacred, marrying De Benoist's pseudoscientific ethnopluralism with white supremacist narratives of European superiority, producing a simple, straightforward version of the "true Europe" narrative that justifies the rejection and exclusion of all "nonwhite" inhabitants in areas that Identitarians perceive as white homelands.⁴³

Though Identitarianism continues to flourish in Western Europe, its influence diminishes the further east one travels in Europe. While a significant portion of the next chapter explores potential reasons for this, it can be summarized briefly: in the lived histories of individuals from Central and Eastern Europe—many of whom are still alive—these regions have not been treated as part of the "true Europe." The inhabitants of countries that spent most of the 20th century aligned with the Eastern Bloc, only to enter the 21st century in various states of palatability to the West, sought alternative qualities to embrace as identity markers. In Poland, for example, national cultural identity is closely tied to the Catholic faith, which is often fetishized as an intrinsic aspect of Polish national identity despite being an ostensibly universal religion. Central and Eastern European narratives around nationalism and identity that feature Identitarian rhetoric thusly indicate a significant degree of GCR collaboration, and a convergence towards a broader, more deeply systematized set of GCR arguments for a monolithically white, Christian Europe.

Catholic nationalism in Poland

Catholicism runs deep in Poland, largely due to an "ingrained but highly selective telling of national history," with the Church serving as a constant identity marker through partition and occupation.⁴⁴ In his opening speech at the Intermarium Conference, Ordo Iuris lawyer Tymoteusz Zych claimed that

37 Jean-Yves Camus, "Alain de Benoist and the New Right," in *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right*, ed. Mark Sedgwick. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 78.

38 De Benoist, 1974, quoted in Camus, 2019, 78.

39 Simon Murdoch and Joe Mulhall. "From Banners to Bullets: The International Identitarian Movement," HOPEnotHate, 2019.

40 De Benoist's views clearly resonate with Waldstein's discussion of ideal political communities. In his 2020 article (previously cited in my discussion of Catholic integralism), Risto Saarinen treats Identitarianism and Catholic integralism as two new, dangerous types of Christian conservatism.

41 Jussi Backman, "Radical conservatism and the Heideggerian right: Heidegger, de Benoist, Dugin," *Frontiers of Political Science* 4, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2022.941799>; Tamir Bar-On, "The Alt-Right's continuation of the 'cultural war' in Euro-American societies," *Thesis Eleven* 163, no. 1 (April 2021): 43-70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07255136211005988>.

42 Tamir Bar-On, "The Identitarian Movement and its Contemporary Manifestations," in *Routledge Handbook of Non-Violent Extremism*, ed. Elisa Orofino and William Allchoron, 302-321. Routledge, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003032793-24>.

43 Goran Dahl, "Inspiration and Sources," in *The Nature of Identitarianism*, (London: Routledge, 2023), 35-86. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/10.4324/9780429060106>.

44 Brian Porter-Szucs, *Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

the medieval Polish Catholic Saint Stanislaw of Skarbimierz “inspired the emergence and development of the Republic of Poland.”⁴⁵ In the first half of the 20th century, the constructed archetype of the *Polak-Katolik*, the “Pole-Catholic,” illustrated an intensified conflation, representing an inextricable, organismal sameness between Polishness and Catholicism.⁴⁶ Catholicism was claimed as a Polish national trait, and Poland was thus universalized to every corner of the Earth where Catholicism is present. Unsurprisingly, thanks to its 20th-century inception, the *Polak-Katolik* has historically existed in opposition to the caricatured, quasi-monstrous figure of the Jew, who was both equated with and charged with atheism, communism, and the destruction of Christianity and Christian Europe. However, this oppositional figure can change as necessary to keep the narrative relevant; the archetypal threat in Polish ethnic nationalism “was once Jews but [is] now immigrants from the Middle East and Africa.”⁴⁷

The *Polak-Katolik* and the Polish nationalist narrative that informs this archetype illustrate a nationally specific iteration of the “true Europe” narrative, where ethnic identity does not necessarily serve as a linchpin. As a reactionary movement, Identitarianism allows for aggression to be redirected toward other groups as they become relevant, but the Polish example shows how nationalist narratives can deviate from traditional structures. This is not to deny that ethnic nationalist narratives still abound in populist rhetoric, but “traditional” xenophobia often comes paired with other forms of discrimination. The modern international right rallies against “gender ideology,” a term created to invoke the image of an unnatural attack on the natural order. Feminists, gay and trans-inclusive activists, and abortion rights activists are all considered “gender ideologists.” Polish Catholic nationalism, international Catholic integralism, and Identitarianism all fit into the multivalent ideological structure that dominates the international right, blending sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and anti-migrant sentiment into an argument for a return to “traditional values.”

“Gender Ideology”

The “anti-gender” movement, a creation of the modern Catholic Church, is overwhelmingly Christian and has few secular participants.⁴⁸ The Vatican has become increasingly structured in its understanding of gender roles since the postwar period and has come to understand “human nature as intrinsically binary and the social order as based on this ontological dichotomy.”⁴⁹ Beginning in the 1990s with Pope John Paul II, Church leadership sought to put ideological opponents on the defensive with the term *gender ideology*, “[conjuring] a vision in which the spheres of beliefs and ideas are separated from the sphere of reality, and gender is allocated to the former, thereby undermining the knowledge production and truth claims of many decades of gender studies scholarship.”⁵⁰ By situating the notion of binary gender firmly within the natural law paradigm, Church leaders sought to curtail the possibility of debate on gender and gender roles through recourse to a higher power. This framing of perpetuated or increased inequality through the maintenance of “tradition” as a protective maneuver resonated widely with other conservative groups, who were already using contemporary anxieties around modernization to garner support for their movements.

Since the 1990s, the “anti-gender” movement has spread far beyond the Vatican and is now highly popular with the GCR. The contemporary international right has selected “gender ideology” as a rhetorically compelling potential threat to the natural order they espouse and thus have centered narratives calling for its attack. At the Intermarium Conference, speakers used “gender” as a buzzword to denote the endangerment of the natural order vis-à-vis the deconstruction of traditional gender roles. For instance, Francisco Javier Borrego Borrego, a Spanish lawyer and former judge of the European Court of Human Rights, attributed “gender ideology” to “the sons of darkness... [who] are using words like arsenic, drop by drop,” in what he presented as a corrupting process that the forces of light must oppose.⁵¹

45 Zych, Intermarium Conference, 35:33. Zych, who was then the rector of Collegium Intermarium, recounted a tale of Stanislaw’s heroic defense of freedom of religion at the 1414 Council of Constance, which coincided with his rectorship at the University of Krakow. It is very likely that a secondary goal of Zych in this situation was to claim Stanislaw’s legacy as his own by drawing parallels between them.

46 Brian Porter-Szucs, “The Birth of the *Polak-Katolik*,” *Sprawy Narodowościowe. Seria nowa*, 2017(49). <https://doi.org/10.11649/sn.1280>.

47 Bolaji Balogun, *Race and the Color-Line: The Boundaries of Europeanness in Poland*. (Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2024), 189.

48 Haley McEwen and Lata Narayanaswamy, “The International Anti-Gender Movement: Understanding the Rise of Anti-Gender Discourses in the Context of Development, Human Rights and Social Protection,” United Nations Research Institute for Social Development Working Paper series, June 2023.

49 Sara Garbagnoli, “Against the Heresy of Immanence: Vatican’s ‘Gender’ as a New Rhetorical Device Against the Denaturalization of the Sexual Order,” *Religion and Gender* 6, no. 2 (2016), 190.

50 Sarah Bracke and David Paternotte, “Unpacking the Sin of Gender,” *Religion and Gender* 6, no. 2 (2016): 143-154. <https://doi.org/10.18352/rg.10167>.

51 Borrego, Intermarium Conference, 8:50:07.

The “gender ideology” narrative presents increasingly diversified conceptions of gender and sexuality as violations of natural law that will ultimately endanger humanity’s potential for moral orientation towards goodness. The anti-gender movement is “closely connected to debates within the Catholic Church... [but intersects] with rising right-wing populism in Europe and... political homophobia designed as a political project to increase state power,” as anti-gender activists scapegoat “gender ideologists” for the “propagation of hedonism, laicism, relativism, and individualism in Western societies.”⁵²

As mobilized by the international right, the “gender ideology” narrative builds on the argumentative frameworks of both the “natural order” and “true Europe” narratives. The “natural order” narrative provides a basic moral binary, while the “true Europe” narrative places multiple real and imagined notions of Europe within that binary. The “gender ideology” narrative complements and simplifies the “true Europe” narrative by constructing an Other—an opposing group that serves as a counterpoint to the inhabitants of the “true Europe,” who are then cast as good because, the narrative claims, their opponents are bad.⁵³ The “gender ideology” narrative thus augments the “natural order” and “true Europe” narratives and benefits from their respective mechanisms that make critical engagement challenging. From the “natural order” narrative, “gender ideology” receives the trait of being functionally inarguable, as it can always be reduced to assertions that things are either natural or unnatural. From the “true Europe” narrative, “gender ideology” gains at-will adaptability of the in-group/out-group dichotomy. Since its inception, the “gender ideology” narrative has successfully mobilized ignorance, intolerance, and insecurity to create a broad supporter base and a set of pervasive narratives.

Anti-gender activists frame their rhetoric in apocalyptic terms, portraying a decisive conflict between the natural and unnatural. In his 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, John Paul II posited “cultures of life” and “cultures of death,” with anti-gender activism positioned within the former and the latter characterized by “murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or wilful [sic] self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person.”⁵⁴ Contemporary anti-gender activists have retained this tactic as a defining feature of the anti-gender movement. In Poland, “gender ideology” has flourished as a hallmark of the “culture of death,” bolstered by the explicit support of the political party Law and Justice (PiS), the country’s deep Catholic roots, and John Paul II’s own Polish origin, which makes him something of a *de facto* folk hero among Polish Catholics. The Polish nationalist right has directed the term “gender ideology” against “feminists, the demand to liberalize the anti-abortion law [which was made progressively more strict under PiS], the LGBT community and their defenders.”⁵⁵ Polish Catholic officials commonly make pronouncements against LGBTQ+ rights; one infamous example came in 2019, when Krakow’s Archbishop Marek Jędraszewski identified “LGBT ideology” as “extremely dangerous, just ‘like other ideologies: red [communist], Bolshevik, or Hitlerite [Nazi]” during a televised interview.⁵⁶

Eastern European anti-gender activists habitually “discredit gender by explicitly linking it to actual totalitarian regimes which claimed millions of victims in the region,” effectively exploiting regional anxieties for rhetorical success.⁵⁷ This tactic, which was central at the Internarium Conference, is just one regional iteration of the “gender ideology” narrative, made personal to the conference’s Central and Eastern European attendees. Universally, though, proponents of “gender ideology” mobilize a right-

52 Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, eds. *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), 8, 5.

53 For a discussion of “gender ideology” outside of Europe, see Doris Buss and Didi Hermann, *Globalizing Family Values: The Christian Right in International Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011) and Sara Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right* (Boston: South End Press, 1989) for the United States; Kopya Kaoma, *Globalizing the Culture Wars: US Conservatives, African Churches & Homophobia* (Somerville: Political Research Associates, 2009) and *Colonizing African Politics: How the US Christian Right is Transforming Sexual Politics in Africa* (Somerville: Political Research Associates, 2012), Adriaan van Klinken, “Gay Rights, the Devil, and the End Times: Public Religion and the Enchantment of the Homosexuality Debate in Zambia,” *Religion* 4, 519-540, and Adriaan van Klinken and Herbert Zebracki, “Porn in Church: Moral Geographies of Homosexuality in Uganda,” *Porn Studies* 1, 89-92, for Africa; Marco Vaggione, *El Activismo Religioso Conservador en Latinoamérica*, (Cordoba: Editorial Ferreyra, 2010) and “La ‘cultura de la vida’: desplazamientos estratégicos del activismo católico conservador frente a los derechos sexuales y reproductivos,” *Religião e Sociedade* 2, 57-80 for Latin America.

54 John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* [Encyclical Letter on the Value and Inviolability of Human Life], The Holy See, March 25, 1995, sec. 3, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html.

55 Piotr Żuk and Paweł Żuk, “Murderers of the unborn’ and ‘sexual degenerates’: analysis of the ‘anti-gender’ discourse of the Catholic Church and the nationalist right in Poland,” *Critical Discourse Studies* 17, no. 5 (2020): 566-588.

56 “LGBT ideology” is like Nazism or Bolshevism and must be resisted, says Polish archbishop,” *Notes from Poland*, November 8, 2019, <https://notesfrompoland.com/2019/11/08/lgbt-ideology-is-like-nazism-or-bolshevism-and-must-be-resisted-says-polish-archbishop/>.

57 Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolezuk, “Worse than Communism and Nazism put together”: war on gender in Poland,” in *Anti-gender campaigns in Europe: mobilizing against equality*, eds. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, 175-195, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Ltd., 2017), 176.

populist “politics of fear” to influence metapolitical and political debates over the future of human rights.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed three narratives that must be understood for an informed discussion of the 2021 Intermarium Conference. The “natural order” narrative, rooted in Thomistic natural law, argues that all things have an ordained purpose and that to go against this purpose is morally impermissible and destructive. Contemporary conservatives use the “natural order” narrative to codify restrictive gender roles and promote “traditional values” in society through means including the instatement of a theocratic government, in arguments which often connect the “natural order” and “true Europe” narratives, as in the case of Waldstein. Grounded in nationalist rhetoric, the “true Europe” narrative argues that Europe should be populated by ideologically pure communities, a quality that the narrative’s proponents often link to Christian faith and white identity. The “gender ideology” narrative, which identifies feminists and LGBTQ+ activists as a socially harmful coalition, draws on the “natural order” narrative to disqualify challenges to traditional binary conceptions of gender within the Catholic paradigm and is now used by European populists as a retooled “true Europe” narrative in order to demonize “gender ideologists” as enemies of the people.

These three narratives are mobilized together by contemporary conservative actors, most notably Western populists and the Global Christian Right, to project a world where cultural heritage is under attack by a perverse cabal of globalists and homosexuals. These narratives are tailored to the specific cultural contexts in which they are deployed; in Central and Eastern Europe, for instance, the threat is often linked to the specter of totalitarianism that continues to influence regional geopolitics. The next chapter explores the recent history and politics of Central and Eastern Europe, tracing a path from historical manipulations of the region to the current political climate, with a focus on the contemporary rise of illiberalism.

The previous chapter dealt with the extensive conservative Christian intellectual lineage to which Collegium Intermarium, Ordo Iuris, and the conference participants are but a few of an immense body of heirs. In this next chapter, I engage another cluster of ideological roots essential for fully appreciating the significance of the Intermarium Conference, discussing the contemporary and recent past of the Central and Eastern European political climate, along with key individuals, concepts, and events that have been instrumental in the progression of a rightward trend in the region's politics. While not universal across Central and Eastern Europe, the conservative trend is notable, with the region's powerful illiberal actors inspiring not only their regional compatriots but also conservative movements abroad.

The key players in this discussion include a mix of political parties and individuals. Hungary's Fidesz and Poland's *Pravo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS), for instance, have been vital to the region's rightward shift, along with their leaders and officials—Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is unquestionably one of the most influential figures associated with this trend, while PiS chairman Jarosław Kaczyński is equally notable. The region's illiberal actors owe considerable intellectual debts to other existing movements; Euro-populists across the EU have popularized key rhetorical frameworks, such as the Eurosceptic narrative, and have stoked European nationalist sentiments.¹ Another intellectual forefather, albeit an often unwelcome and commonly maligned one—especially in Poland—is Russia and the Kremlin.

Since 2015, the European Union's "EUvsDisinfo" initiative has identified and categorized close to 17,000 cases of Kremlin-propagated disinformation. The database's most populated content tags are "anti-Russian," with 1,882 articles, and "European Union," which has 1,332. Collectively, the narratives associated with these tags depict the Russian Federation as a victim, perpetually maligned by other nations and international bodies and accused of crimes that are often argued to lie at the feet of the accusers themselves. The European Union is portrayed as consistently manipulating and devaluing the leadership and democratic processes of its sovereign member countries, poised to attack Russia at any moment, while simultaneously depicted as a weak puppet state controlled by the United States or a shadowy "deep state," the latter being a clear evocation of anti-Semitic sentiment. This anti-EU, self-victimizing narrative is fundamentally Russian nationalist in nature, yet it follows the basic structure of GCR rhetoric, with the conference discourse often echoing the articles in the EUvsDisinfo database. The rhetorical similarities suggest ideological co-belligerence between Central and Eastern European conservatives and the Russian Federation. However, the EUvsDisinfo database also reveals that Central and Eastern Europe is a target of Russian disinformation campaigns exploiting regional traumas and anxieties—specifically, an insecurity about not being, or not being perceived as, sufficiently European. Although the database's "Central Europe" tag is lightly populated with only sixteen articles, it still effectively illustrates this tactic. One particularly relevant article, titled "Western Europeans Perceive the Poles as 'Eastern Barbarians' and 'Slavic Pigs,'" mobilizes centuries-old continental tensions to sow discord, drawing on a history of Central and Eastern European peripheralization and trivialization.² This particular phenomenon is indispensable to understanding the Intermarium Conference's specific iteration of GCR rhetorical structures.

¹ For a discussion of anti-EU populist politics in the Netherlands, France, and Italy, see Koen Vossen, *The Power of Populism: Geert Wilders and the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands*, (London: Routledge, 2016), Daniel Stockemer, *The Front National in France: Continuity and Change under Jean-Marie Le Pen and Marine Le Pen*, (Cham: Springer, 2017), and Daniele Albertazzi, Arianna Giovannini, and Antonella Seddone, "No regionalism please, we are *Leghisti!*": The transformation of the Italian Lega Nord under the leadership of Matteo Salvini," *Regional and Federal Studies* 28, no. 5, (2022): 645-671.

² EUvsDisinfo, "DISINFO: Western Europeans perceive the Poles as 'Eastern barbarians' and 'Slavic pigs,'" [euvsdisinfo.eu](https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/mwestern-europeans-perceive-the-poles-as-eastern-barbarians-and-slavic-pigs/), accessed January 26, 2024.

Continental Dynamics

Many scholars have noted that discourse surrounding who is considered European is rooted in white supremacist thought.³ To be deemed European in such discourses implies a level of social, technological, and even biological development sufficient to “deserve” intellectual superiority and thus the right to determine one’s own affairs as well as those of others. When European identity is tied to geographic space, westward has historically been considered the direction of progress and order, while eastward has been the path to the wild.⁴

As sociologist Ivan Kalmar has noted, the area called Intermarium has long been treated as a buffer zone, qualitatively othered by external forces that manipulate the region and its contents:

First, amid the revolutionary fervor in mid-nineteenth-century Europe, Central Europe or *Mitteleuropa* was a German idea meant to raise the region between Russia and France into a new European force under German leadership. Second, after the First World War, Polish and Czechoslovak versions of Central Europe ironically excluded Germany, and meant to create an alliance that would be politically and culturally located between Germany and Russia. The third incarnation of the Central European idea came in the 1980s... a post-Cold War region in the heart of Europe that would position itself between not only America and Russia but also between heartless capitalism and totalitarian socialism. The fourth version of Central Europe was reinvented as a part of its illiberal revolt. The dream of representing a serious alternative to standard Western and Eastern models of organizing the world remains and is even more evident than ever in illiberal notions of Central Europe.⁵

Intermarium’s appeal is as a counter-narrative—the region is not different because it is less European, but because it is *more* European, an ideologically pure Ur-Europe. The Czech-French novelist Milan Kundera’s characterization of Central Europe’s self-perception as a “small, arch-European Europe” resonates with Polish historian Janusz Tazbir’s comment that “it would take many pages merely to enumerate the titles of Polish and foreign works that from the 15th century onwards have described Poland as a wall, fence, bulwark, shield, or fortress of Christianity,” and political geographer Peter Balogh’s assertion that “in the Hungarian context... the idea of [the nation as] a Christian bulwark... is often used interchangeably with the bastion of Europe or the West.”⁶ This narrative structure of the political bulwark myth belongs to a class of “simplifying and meaningful narratives... [that] delineate ‘an eternal fight between the good and the evil,’ between ‘self’ and ‘Other,’” providing a digestible, binary moral structure that invites claims of superiority.⁷

The idea of Central Europe as deeply European is crucial not only in opposition to the East but also in the region’s relationship to the West, which encompasses both meaningful regional perceptions of the West and broader metanarratives regarding how the West perceives Central Europe:

The tragedy of Central Europe... includes the fact that while Central Europeans struggled beautifully against their kidnapping to the East, the West, in the meantime, took it as a *fait accompli* and indeed seems to have forgotten that Central Europe was ever part of the West: “In the eyes of its beloved Europe, Central Europe is just a part of the Soviet empire and nothing more, nothing more.” Sadly, the reason the West sees in Central Europe only “Eastern Europe” is that it cannot understand how important Central European culture is to Western culture. In

3 For example, see József Böröcz, “Eurowhite’ Conceit, ‘Dirty White’ Ressentment: ‘Race’ in Europe,” *Sociological Forum* 36(4), December 2021: 1116-1134; David Theo Goldberg, “Racial Europeanization,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29(2), 2006: 331-364, and Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People*, New York, NY: W. W. Norton Books, 2010.

4 Manuella Boatcă, “Multiple Europes and the Politics of Difference Within,” in *The study of Europe*, 51-66. Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783845225487-51>

5 Ivan Kalmar, *White but Not Quite: Central Europe’s Illiberal Revolt*. Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press (2022), 75.

6 Kalmar, *White but Not Quite*, 85, quoting from Kundera, *The Tragedy of Central Europe*; Janusz Tazbir, “The bulwark myth,” *Acta Poloniae Historica* 91 (2005): 73-97; Péter Balogh, “Clashing geopolitical self-images? The strange co-existence of Christian bulwark and Eurasianism (Turanism) in Hungary,” *Eurasian geography and economics* 63, no. 6 (2022): 726-752. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2020.1779772>

7 Liliya Berezhnaya and Heidi Hein-Kircher, “Rampart Nations: Bulwark Myths of East European Multiconfessional Societies in the Age of Nationalism,” (Berghahn Books, 2019), 5; the political myth format resonates nicely with Roger Griffin’s formula for ideal-type fascism.

fact, Western Europe cannot recognize its own Western culture anymore, because “Europe itself is in the process of losing its own cultural identity.”⁸

In the political myths of Intermarium, Central Europe is the last living relic of a past world that should be rightfully valued for its unadulterated Europeaness but which is devalued by a modern Europe that has lost its own essence.

The Visegrád Group, formed in early 1991 as the Soviet Union was undergoing its long, painful collapse, took up this narrative structure and was instrumental in the development of contemporary Central European illiberalism. The leadership of the four Visegrád countries—Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia—did not deconstruct the East-West divide under which their countries had been peripheralized but sought to locate themselves firmly on the Western side. In placing the Visegrád countries with the West, leaders set their countries up for reentry into Western society and accession to the preeminent Western organ—the European Union.

EU accession was a key step in Central European illiberals’ rise to power. The Visegrád countries entered the European Union in 2004, mindful of the need to maintain good conduct and adhere to strict governance conditions.⁹ The region’s burgeoning illiberal forces, from the nascent PiS to the just-rebranded Fidesz, focused heavily on anti-Communist and pro-Western sentiments and saw EU membership as the pathway to economic and political success, even as national conservative tendencies engendered early anxieties around potential conflicts between EU-level and national law.¹⁰ Post-accession emigration rates, together with the 2009–2010 Eurozone crisis and the 2015–2016 migration crisis, progressively worsened CEE outlooks on the impact of EU membership for their respective countries. As differing relationships with Russia have strained connections among Central European illiberals in recent years, a shared and co-created Eurosceptic sentiment has emerged as an attractive rallying point for the region. Regional perspectives on the European Union have never been perfectly aligned, but Central European illiberals have deftly co-opted existing right-wing narratives of the EU as morally and culturally bankrupt, flipping the script to cast the EU as the “Other” in the “true Europe” framework, thereby defining conservative Christian Central Europe as the “true Europe.” This has provided an attractive rallying point, as illiberal politicians simultaneously enflame historically rooted anti-elitist resentments and assuage them by praising the region for its purported superiority over Western Europe.

Euroscepticism and its Many Uses

“Greek communists, Hungarian neo-Nazis, [and] Dutch Christian conservatives” all number among the teeming ranks of Eurosceptics, the proponents of an ideology with goals ranging from “changing specific parts of EU legislation, through major policy reform, to withdrawing from all or part of the system.”¹¹ Scholars of Euroscepticism commonly divide the ideology into “hard” and “soft” varieties, with “hard Euroscepticism” denoting complete withdrawal, as with Brexit, and “soft Euroscepticism” indicating criticism while accepting the overall structure.¹² Central European illiberals tend to mobilize soft Euroscepticist sentiments, criticizing the European Union’s perceived attempts at cultural domination and homogenization. Broadly speaking, this illiberal discontent revolves around the EU’s liberal orientation, framing liberalism as an alien ideology to Europe and a representative of “false European” values. The strand of Central European Euroscepticism present at the Intermarium Conference fits within this framework, ultimately arguing that Central Europe’s proper role is as a conservative counterbalance within the European Union, reversing the organization’s ideological polarity and bringing Europe back to its true roots.

The “true Europe” narrative represents a point of overlap between morality-driven GCR rhetoric and populist demagoguery. Transnational populist radical right (PRR) narratives present the EU

8 Kalmar, *White but Not Quite*, 87, quoting from Kundera, *The Tragedy of Central Europe*.

9 Christian Schweiger, “The CEE countries’ first decade of EU membership: from policy-takers towards agenda-setters?”, *Problemy Polityki Społecznej. Studia i Dyskusje* 31, no. 4 (2015): 99–118. <https://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.desklight-d012a7fa-7e14-4bc3-8afi-4eb1a3cbf71d>

10 Agnes Batory, “The Political Context of EU Accession in Hungary,” London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2002, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Europe/hungarian.pdf>; Aleks Szczerbiak, “The Political Context of EU Accession in Poland,” London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2002, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Europe/polish.pdf>.

11 Benjamin Leruth, Nicholas Startin, and Simon Usherwood, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2017).

12 Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak, “The party politics of Euroscepticism in EU member and candidate states,” 2002. https://www.academia.edu/download/49488304/The_Party_Politics_of_Euroscepticism_in_20161009-7770-52v9d.pdf

as a corrupt, overpowered institution bent on destroying national sovereignty and ethnic solidarity to protect the interests of morally corrupt elites.¹³ Familiar phobias are at play here, as “Christian civilizational identity” is contrasted with “gender ideology,” Islam, and the idea of immigration as a civilizational threat. The Polish exceptionalist bulwark myth is an “Alt-Europe” narrative, which presents an idealized Poland as an existent, universally achievable iteration of “true Europe”; “[i]ts proposal of Poland’s conservative ‘model of social life’ as a ‘good example’ for all Europe recalls traditional messianic narratives of Poland as Europe’s shield against Eastern barbarism.”¹⁴ Another familiar bogeyman native to Central Europe is the tendency of the Polish and Hungarian governments to liken the EU to the Soviet Union, reflecting “a willingness [among PRR leaders] to exploit identity-based anxieties and inferiority complexes in this region.”¹⁵

PRR leaders mobilize these narratives to reject EU domination—more specifically, to reject the idea that the EU should be allowed to intervene in member states’ national politics or overturn decisions made in national courts. Instead, they champion the principle of subsidiarity, which holds that all possible decisions should be made at the lowest (here, national) level. In practice, the principle of subsidiarity is a reliable talking point for PRR leaders to demonize unwanted EU mandates as tyrannical. While these parties frequently critique EU policies and institutions, such as the European Court of Justice, that have previously challenged illiberal national policies, they have been largely supportive of EU economic policies that benefit them—especially Poland, the member state that currently benefits the most from EU funding sources.¹⁶ Although national interests often obstruct fully realized political cooperation among PRR parties, national actors continue to co-construct a metapolitical community that unites populists across Europe and directs their efforts against a common enemy.

By casting EU authorities as dictatorial, illiberal Eurosceptics bring into question the validity of the EU’s influence on member states’ national politics. Ultimately, these actors seek to weaken the capacity of EU structures to intervene in member states’ political actions that violate EU law, allowing member states to theoretically enjoy all the benefits of EU membership without adhering to its constraints. The Hungarian and Polish governments of the early 21st century have paired this Eurosceptical rhetoric with a gradual governmental overhaul, entrenching conservative ideologies into liberal structures, with *Ordo Iuris* and the *Intermarium* Conference participants both supporting and benefiting from this illiberal shift.

Forging the Path Backward

In November 2016, Hungarian political scientist Andras Pap characterized the country’s government under Viktor Orbán as having “successfully built a state-funded (pseudo) NGO sector... [which] convincingly offered anti-modernism and anti-cosmopolitanism/Europeanism as a... (potentially exportable) Hungarian model of illiberal democracy.”¹⁷ Seven years later, Pap’s observation has proven prescient. The EU, he points out, is not built to handle member states that are not interested in abiding by the rules. Viktor Orbán was able to take advantage of this by engaging in what Pap calls “worst practice” legislation, which functions through plausible—and sometimes implausible—deniability. Through a combination of careful language and stacking the government with decision-makers who interpret that language in the way illiberal leaders wish it to be interpreted, it is possible to create an “illiberal democracy” akin to Orbán’s Hungary—an approach that PiS similarly employed over eight years to reshape Poland.

Right-wing sentiments have been trending towards the mainstream in Poland since the early 2000s, beginning with a parliamentary coalition formed by three right-wing nationalist parties—League of Polish Families, PiS, and Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland—that briefly held power from 2005 to 2007. In 2015, PiS returned to power; the party’s presidential and prime ministerial candidates, Andrzej Duda and Beata Szydło, won their respective elections in May and October of that year, with the

13 Cas Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

14 Richard McMahon, “Is Alt-Europe possible? Populist radical right counternarratives of European integration,” *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 30, no. 1 (2022): 10–25. <https://www.tandfonline-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/doi/full/10.1080/14782804.2021.1919865>.

15 Edit Zgut, “United in Euroscepticism: Populist Foreign Policy in Hungary and Poland,” *Istanbul, istanpol.org*, September 23, 2021. <https://istanpol.org/en/post-united-in-euroscepticism-populist-foreign-policy-in-hungary-and-poland>.

16 “Inauguration of the new EU financial perspective 2021–2027 - almost PLN 350 billion for Poland,” Chancellery of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland, *gov.pl*, February 8, 2023. <https://www.gov.pl/web/primeminister/inauguration-of-the-new-eu-financial-perspective-2021-2027---almost-pln-350-billion-for-poland#>

17 Andras L. Pap, *Democratic Decline in Hungary: Law and Society in an Illiberal Democracy*, (London: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 2. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315168005>

October parliamentary elections also granting PiS parliamentary majority status. Szydło was succeeded by fellow PiS member Mateusz Morawiecki in 2017, and Duda won re-election in 2019. Thus, at the time of the Intermarium Conference in May 2021, PiS was well-entrenched in the Polish government, having steadily worked for six years to remove checks on government power, silence dissent, and restrict freedoms.¹⁸

PiS is widely considered a right-wing populist party, habitually attacking “immigrants, Islamists and ‘traitors of the nation’... [while creating] their own elites and [continuing] to call themselves representatives of the people even after taking over full power in the state.”¹⁹ PiS’ party line is inherently hypocritical, claiming to combat repression while stamping out the opposition, and using its dominant position to perpetuate anti-elitist criticism, directed both against Polish “‘communist-liberal pacts’ [which ostensibly] worked to ‘steal the transition’” from democracy and against EU authorities for their perceived oversteps.²⁰ The party’s authoritarian inclination is reflected in its history of reforms. After gaining power, PiS moved to change the Polish constitution:

Lacking the two-thirds of majority needed to change the constitution outright, as Hungary’s government had done several years earlier, PiS sought to accomplish the same goal through ordinary legislation. When the Constitutional Tribunal objected, its rulings were ignored until it could be packed with government supporters, some of whom were sworn in by the president—a strong partisan of PiS himself, who made no effort to stand in the government’s way—in a rushed, middle-of-the-night ceremony. The national legislature was likewise turned into a rubber-stamp body through routine side-stepping of parliamentary procedure.²¹

This cleared the path for PiS to implement a range of changes that advanced its agenda—weakening the judiciary, restricting NGO activities, consolidating control over the media, and changing civil service hiring requirements. This latter move led to the widespread appointment and promotion of PiS sympathizers and supporters, who were able to use their newfound power as CEOs and judges to accelerate PiS’ illiberal changes outside the party’s purview.²² PiS quickly moved to control and conservatize civil society—the “third sector” of society, which is theoretically separate from the governmental and business spheres—specifically pertaining to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs). Central in this effort was the governmental *Narodowy Instytut Wolności*, or National Institute of Freedom—Centre for Civil Society Development (NIW).

The NIW was first announced in 2016 by PiS-appointed Minister of Culture and National Heritage Piotr Gliński, who characterized the NIW as aiming to “provide all Polish civil society organizations with an equal access to public funds.”²³ However, it quickly became clear that the NIW was intended to channel governmental funds to conservative CSOs, inflating Polish conservative civil society and creating the appearance of greater societal alignment with PiS’ trajectory. Gliński, who gave an opening speech at the Intermarium Conference, has been associated with PiS since 2012 when PiS chairman Jarosław Kaczyński “plucked him from relative obscurity to be the party’s candidate for prime minister” in hopes that Gliński, who shared PiS’ “skepticism of gays [and] its support for coal and battling permissiveness in state-funded culture,” could present these ideas less abrasively than Kaczyński himself.²⁴ In his conference speech, Gliński reproduced PiS’ anti-elite rhetoric, praising Collegium Intermarium for its “[promotion of] freedom [and] pluralism of thinking” and grassroots status. He claimed that Collegium Intermarium had been established “from the bottom and not from above,” positioning it as a response to “[the significant threat to] the freedom of pluralism... in modern life and in the

¹⁸ Marta Kotwas and Jan Kubik, “Destructive Ambiguity: How Polish Populist Incumbents Tinker with Electoral Fairness,” *illiberalism.org*, October 3, 2023. <https://www.illiberalism.org/destructive-ambiguity-how-polish-populist-incumbents-tinker-with-electoral-fairness/>.

¹⁹ Paweł Żuk and Piotr Żuk, “Multimodal analysis of the nationalist discourse and historical inspirations of the spectacle of the populist right in Poland between 2015 and 2017.” *Discourse, Context, and Media* 26 (2018): 135-136. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2018.07.005>.

²⁰ Bartek Pytlas, “Party Organisation of PiS in Poland: Between Electoral Rhetoric and Absolutist Practice,” *Politics and Governance* 9, no. 4 (2021): 341. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v9i4.4479>.

²¹ Hubert Tworzecki, “Poland: A Case of Top-Down Polarization,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 681, vol. 1 (2019): 99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716218809322>

²² Monika Sieradzka, “Poland: taking stock after eight years of PiS government.” *Deutsche Welle*, September 27, 2023. <https://www.dw.com/en/poland-taking-stock-after-eight-years-of-pis-government/a-66934698>; “Poland: Media capture fears confirmed in new report examining PKN Orlen takeover of Polska Press.” European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, *ecpmf.eu*. July 13, 2023. <https://www.ecpmf.eu/poland-media-capture-fears-confirmed-in-new-report-examining-pkn-orken-takeover-of-polska-press/>.

²³ Paweł Marczewski, “Freedom to exclude: conservative CSOs in law and justice Poland.” *The Mobilization of Conservative Civil Society* (2018): 51-56. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep26931.11>

²⁴ Annabelle Chapman, “Piotr Gliński: Poland’s anti-gay Green,” *Politico*, March 14, 2016. <https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-kaczynski-homosexual-pis-gays-culture-democracy/>.

academic society.”²⁵ These claims of equality, promotion of freedom of speech, and grassroots status are not merely standard populist rhetoric—relying on an everyman image to stoke sympathy from the populace—but have become commonplace in contemporary Poland, even before PiS adopted the tactic. Polish conservative CSOs use this language to claim victim status and thus justify special treatment by Gliński’s NIW, in what Polish studies scholar Stanley Bill calls PiS’ practice of “elite replacement.”²⁶ Not only are individuals promoted based on their ideological alignment with the PiS party line, but CSOs that share PiS’ values and goals receive financial support, while those that are deemed problematic face targeted attacks.

Ordo Iuris is a prime example of a PiS-aligned CSO, of a type that Marczewski terms “policy influencers, [who seek to] sway the legal system in a conservative direction, such as penalizing abortion, limiting anti-discrimination organizations... or securing Catholics the right to publicly express *or act on* their views.”²⁷ These legal machinations have been coupled with governmental grants funneled through several organizations under Gliński’s Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and distributed with a strong preference for illiberally inclined organizations.²⁸ Tymoteusz Zych, who was the vice president of Ordo Iuris until an acrimonious split just months after the Intermarium Conference, sat on the NIW’s board, along with PiS politicians and Intermarium Conference participants Piotr Mazurek and Piotr Patkowski.²⁹ In June 2021, just a month after the Intermarium Conference, the Polish government’s months-old “Patriotic Fund,” overseen by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, granted over 3 million zloty (nearly \$800,000 USD) to national extremist organizations linked to an influential Polish fascist.³⁰

At the time of the Intermarium Conference, PiS was receiving criticism on multiple fronts. In October of the previous year, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights published a press release calling the abortion ban a “violation of [the country’s] international human rights obligations.”³¹ The first months of 2021 saw continued friction between the Polish government and the European Court of Justice (ECJ), the EU’s supreme court, as the European Commission initiated legal proceedings in February over two rulings that “directly challenged the primacy of EU law... [and] constitute a breach of Article 19(1) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), which guarantees the right to effective judicial protection.”³² Just days before the Intermarium Conference, a top advisor to the ECJ argued that a Polish law enabling then-Justice Minister Zbigniew Ziobro, a longtime PiS loyalist, to both appoint judges to the nation’s high courts and revoke those appointments at will was similarly incompatible with EU treaties.³³

In Poland, the end of 2020 brought public “criticism [that] escalated to charges of favoritism and corruption” over government spending with the revelation that the beneficiaries of a “cultural recovery fund” included “wealthy celebrities and pop stars.”³⁴ At the beginning of 2021, the country’s existing free press protested against proposed taxes on advertising revenues, which were widely considered a veiled attack on the country’s few remaining independent media outlets.³⁵ Protests and demonstrations continued as PiS’ near-total abortion ban, which was opposed by the majority of Poles, took effect in what Ordo Iuris representative Karolina Pawłowska called “a great step towards the realization of the

25 Gliński, Intermarium Conference, 44:40-59:14.

26 Stanley Bill, “Counter-elite populism and civil society in Poland: PiS’s strategies of elite replacement,” *East European Politics and Societies* 36, no. 1 (2022): 118-140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325420950800>

27 Marczewski, 54; emphasis my own.

28 Justyna Kajta, “In Poland, public funding is given to those threatening liberal democracy,” *openDemocracy*, July 22, 2021. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/poland-public-funding-given-those-threatening-liberal-democracy/>.

29 “Skład Rady NIW-CRSO,” *niw.gov.pl*, accessed February 16, 2024. <https://niw.gov.pl/en/about-nfi/council-of-the-national-institute-of-freedom/members-of-the-nfi-board/>.

30 “Stop financing fascism’: public figures appeal to Polish government after grants to far-right groups,” *Notes from Poland*, June 30, 2021. <https://notesfrompoland.com/2021/06/30/stop-financing-fascism-polish-public-figures-tell-culture-minister-after-grants-to-far-right-groups/>.

31 “Poland has slammed door shut on legal and safe abortions - UN experts,” Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, October 27, 2020. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2020/10/poland-has-slammed-door-shut-legal-and-safe-abortions-un-experts>.

32 “Brussels launches legal action against Poland for ‘challenging primacy of EU law,’” *Notes from Poland*, February 15, 2023. <https://notesfrompoland.com/2023/02/15/brussels-launches-legal-action-against-poland-for-challenging-primacy-of-eu-law/>.

33 “Polish law on judges violates EU treaty, says ECJ adviser,” *Al Jazeera*, May 20, 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/20/ecj-adviser-says-polish-law-on-judges-contradicts-eu-treaties>; Several months after the conference, this came to a head when the EU began fining Poland €1 million per day, which continued despite Polish assertions that they had implemented restrictions, until the daily penalty was halved to €500,000 daily in April 2023.

34 Naomi Rea, “Poland Has Frozen Its Culture Bailout Program After Widespread Criticism Over Millions Being Allocated to Celebrities,” *artnet*, November 17, 2020. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/archives/poland-culture-recovery-fund-1024242>.

35 Claudia Ciobanu, “Polish Government’s Assault on the Free Media: ‘Death by a Thousand Cuts,’” *Balkan Insight*, February 15, 2021. Accessed February 16, 2024. <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/02/15/polish-governments-assault-on-the-free-media-death-by-a-thousand-cuts/>.

human rights of all human beings.”³⁶ In March 2021, Ordo Iuris was instrumental in drafting a law that would require Poland’s withdrawal from the 2011 Istanbul Convention against domestic violence and violence against women, and replace it instead with an “alternative treaty that [while ostensibly serving the same main purpose] bans abortion and homosexual marriage.”³⁷

During the same period, Ordo Iuris came under increased scrutiny, with independent researchers highlighting the organization’s connections abroad, including clear connections with international conservative juggernauts like the Alliance Defending Freedom and the World Congress of Families, along with recently founded sibling organizations in the Balkan countries.³⁸ Longer chains of influence link Ordo Iuris to the Kremlin and a Brazilian monarchist Catholic cult.³⁹ It is to this complicated history and to Ordo Iuris’ contemporary network that we now turn.

Tangled Roots

In 1960, a wealthy Brazilian Catholic politician and landowner, Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira, founded the movement that led to Ordo Iuris’ creation. Corrêa de Oliveira, a dedicated Catholic monarchist and hierarchical thinker, saw the 21st century as hopelessly deviant from the world’s natural state. Fixing on the Protestant, October, and French revolutions as successive destabilizations of the natural order, he created a movement called Tradition, Family, Property (TFP), which he expected to return “former aristocracy and analogous traditional elites to their historic *and rightful* positions of power... to lead the world and thus save Western civilization by restoring authentic Christianity, all the while supported by the TFP warrior monks, while the rest of the population is reduced to a state of docile serfdom.”⁴⁰

From Brazil, TFP spread first within South America, then across the Atlantic, with outposts in France, Italy, Germany, Austria, and Poland. The movement’s ideological targets have shifted to match the times, opposing liberation theology and Communism in the 1960s before shifting focus to the “anti-gender” arena in the 1990s. Corrêa de Oliveira’s death in 1995 led to a schism within the movement, which resulted in a more atomized network with less obvious intercontinental connections. Separated from this conflict, TFP’s European offshoots continued to spread.

The Father Piotr Skarga Association for Christian Culture was founded in 1999 in Warsaw, Poland. The Association’s founding members included “an elderly Brazilian citizen of Polish origin, Leonard Przybysz, and the translator of [Corrêa de Oliveira’s] *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, Sławomir Oleniczak, [who] heads the association, [which] he founded together with Sławomir Skiba and Arkadiusz Stelmach.”⁴¹ Olejniczak, Skiba, and Stelmach are all former members of Poland’s metapolitical Conservative-Monarchist Club, which upholds TFP’s fundamental tenets, with an ideological declaration asserting that “when society matures, a favorable social order will spontaneously exist based on the true values of the spirit... a hierarchical order, at the top of which will stand a monarch anointed by God as the guarantor of freedom and prosperity.”⁴² Two years after its creation, the Piotr Skarga Association created its first offshoot, the Piotr Skarga Institute for Christian Education Foundation.

The Piotr Skarga Foundation has received significant criticism from independent researchers and journalists, who highlight the organization’s extravagant wealth, grand-scale marketing of devotional items to Catholics throughout Poland, and solicitation of “free donations” as a form of prayer, akin to modern-day indulgences, as indicators of the foundation’s true intention—the collection of excessive wealth.⁴³ While the extent of the foundation’s wealth seemingly remains unclear, VSquare estimated in 2020 that its portfolio of properties was worth more than 23 million Polish złoty, or nearly \$6

36 “Poland enforces controversial near-total abortion ban,” *BBC News*, January 28, 2021. Accessed February 16, 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-55838210>.

37 Claudia Ciobanu, “Poland’s replacement for Istanbul Convention would ban abortion and gay marriage,” *Balkan Insight*, March 15, 2021. <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/03/15/polands-replacement-for-istanbul-convention-would-ban-abortion-and-gay-marriage/>.

38 “Ordo Iuris and a global web of ultra-conservative organizations,” *VSquare*, May 7, 2021. <https://vsquare.org/ordo-iuris-and-a-global-web-of-ultra-conservative-organisations/>; Ana Brakus, “Poland’s Hidden Hand Behind Croatian Catholic Lobby Group,” *Balkan Insight*, October 30, 2018. <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/10/30/poland-s-hidden-hand-behind-croatian-catholic-lobby-group-10-29-2018/>.

39 Klementyna Suchanow, “Ordo Iuris and the Kremlin: Evidence presented by Klementyna Suchanow,” *resetobywatelski.pl*, January 24, 2022. <https://resetobywatelski.pl/ordo-iuris-and-the-kremlin-evidence-presented-by-klementyna-suchanow/>; Neil Datta, “Modern Day Crusaders in Europe. Tradition, family and property: Analysis of a transnational, ultra-conservative, Catholic-inspired influence network.” https://www.epfweb.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Modern%20Day%20Crusaders%20in%20Europe%20-%20TFP%20Report_1.pdf

40 Datta, “Modern day crusaders in Europe,” 8.

41 Jakub Woroncow, “Jedni naciągają na Maryję, drudzy na ojca Pio. Emeryci dostają listy od skłóconych odłamów sekty,” *Okio*, January 5, 2021. <https://oko.press/jedni-naciagaja-na-maryje-drudzy-na-ojca-pio>.

42 “Deklaracja ideaowa,” Klub Zachowawstwo-Monarchistyczny, <https://kzm.org.pl/index.php/deklaracja-ideaowa>.

43 Konrad Szczegiel, “The Golden Boys of Fatima,” *VSquare*, November 20, 2020. <https://vsquare.org/the-golden-boys-of-fatima/>.

million USD. Alongside purchasing property, the foundation has continued TFP's practice of creating subsidiary organizations, with the foundation of the Ordo Iuris Institute for Legal Culture Foundation in 2013.

All Roads lead to Warsaw

Ordo Iuris' founding statute, established in June 2013, states that Ordo Iuris' goal is to conduct "research on the legal culture and spiritual heritage in which Polish culture is rooted, and their promotion in public life and the legal system," under which is subsumed "working for respect for marriage as a union of woman and man... the legal protection of children against demoralization and depravity" and "working for public respect of the spiritual heritage of the nation, in which Polish culture is rooted."⁴⁴ Ordo Iuris thus constitutes the TFP network's entry into the legal space, using the language of the law to turn TFP's metapolitical battle against equality into one that is explicitly political.

Ordo Iuris has benefited from right-wing connections since its inception. The organization's achievements and activities within its first year belie profitable relationships with fellow TFP offshoots, conservative American evangelical associations, and Russian oligarchs closely associated with the Russian Orthodox Church. Investigative journalist Klementyna Suchanow centers Russian influence in her discussion of Ordo Iuris, arguing that "the World Congress of Families, Agenda Europe, CitizenGo, Ordo Iuris, and many others—these are all elements of a fundamentalist machine, fueled by the Kremlin."⁴⁵ It is entirely possible that Ordo Iuris is, at least in part, a Russian influence mechanism, but it is also indebted to and influenced by TFP and the European and American Christian right. These loosely networked groups collaborate when it suits them, each pursuing their own interests and goals. No one group can truly be credited with the creation of Ordo Iuris—it is a product of the modern international right. Therefore, highlighting key points in Ordo Iuris' development is not intended to be exhaustive; instead, it is meant to merely chart the organization's path to its current state.

In December 2013, six months after its founding, Ordo Iuris posted its first petition on the right-wing crowdfunding platform CitizenGO, challenging a bill for its inclusivity of same-sex couples. The petition was provocatively titled "Privileges for Homosexuals Behind Our Backs."⁴⁶ CitizenGO, itself a product of the Spanish TFP offshoot *Hazte Oír* ("Make Yourself Heard"), is "the main online outlet for an unlikely coalition of the US Christian right, militant European Catholics, Russian Orthodox hardliners and even sanctioned oligarchs"—a cadre into which Ordo Iuris fits seamlessly.⁴⁷ The following year, the Piotr Skarga Foundation was listed as a partner organization of the ultra-conservative, homophobic World Congress of Families (WCF) at the WCF's informal 2014 Moscow summit.⁴⁸ Russian oligarchs Alexey Komov and Konstantin Malofeev, both close associates of Vladimir Putin, have documented connections to CitizenGO and the WCF, respectively. Komov sits on CitizenGO's board of trustees and is the WCF's Russian representative, while Malofeev is a significant sponsor of the WCF and the founder of St. Basil's Charitable Foundation, which is widely suspected to be an unofficial avenue for the Kremlin to channel funding to international illiberal initiatives that seek to destabilize the European Union.⁴⁹ While the Piotr Skarga Foundation was involved with the international right, Ordo Iuris' lawyers supported the then-opposition PiS, which would rise to power the next year, in drafting a complaint "claiming that Polish anti-domestic violence law is unconstitutional as it allows 'excessive involvement of the government' in family life."⁵⁰ Thus, in 2015, Ordo Iuris was poised for maximal influence, with connections both within Poland and abroad.

For nearly a decade, the organization's focus has been on capitalizing on this influence. Ordo Iuris has continuously collaborated with ultra-conservative powerhouse groups such as the American Alliance

44 "Statut Ordo Iuris," *ordoioris.pl*, <https://ordoioris.pl/sites/default/files/inline-files/Statut%20Ordo%20Iuris.pdf>

45 Klementyna Suchanow, "Ordo Iuris and the Kremlin: Evidence presented by Klementyna Suchanow," *resetobywatelski.pl*, January 24, 2022. <https://resetobywatelski.pl/ordo-iuris-and-the-kremlin-evidence-presented-by-klementyna-suchanow/>

46 "Przywileje dla par homoseksualnych za naszymi pleciami," *CitizenGO*, December 12, 2013. <https://citizengo.org/pl/1053-ustawy-o-cudzoziemcach>.

47 Jasper Jackson, Niamh McIntyre, Misbah Khan, Antoineta Roussi, and Selase Kove-Seyram, "Unholy alliance: the far-right religious network attacking reproductive and LGBTQ rights," *The Bureau Investigates*, September 25, 2022. <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2022-09-25/unholy-alliance-the-far-right-religious-network-attacking-reproductive-and-lgbtq-rights/>

48 Anna Mierzwińska, "Egzotyczna koalicja przeciw LGBT w Polsce: radykalowie religijni, skrajna prawica, Rosja i PiS," *Okó*, August 2, 2019. <https://oko.press/egzotyczna-koalicja-przeciw-lgbt-w-polsce-radykalowie-religijni-skraina-prawica-rosja-i-pis>

49 Monica Pronczuk and Valerie Hopkins, "Western Banks Helped Fund Blacklisted Oligarch's Charity," *New York Times*, August 27, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/27/world/europe/blacklisted-oligarch-western-banks-russia.html>.

50 Lidia Kurasinska, "This ultra-conservative institute has infiltrated the Polish state, on a relentless quest to ban abortion," *OpenDemocracy*, July 30, 2018. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/ultra-conservative-institute-has-infiltrated-polish-state-to-ban-abortion/>

Defending Freedom (ADF), which was instrumental in the June 2022 overturn of American abortion rights, and the European Center for Law and Justice (ECLJ), which is itself a European offshoot of the American Center for Law and Justice, founded in the 1990s by Pat Robertson, a leading conservative evangelical figure.⁵¹ In 2016, Ordo Iuris hosted the annual Agenda Europe summit, which serves as an international networking and idea-sharing event for conservative organizations dedicated to opposing sexual and reproductive rights.⁵² The same year, the Piotr Skarga Association co-founded the Vigilare Foundation, “one of the most powerful players in an increasingly powerful conservative movement in Croatia,” a country which has had its own recent challenges with Catholic conservatism, and installed Sławomir Olejniczak and Arkadiusz Stelmach, the founding members of the Piotr Skarga Association, on Vigilare’s supervisory board.⁵³

Ordo Iuris reached an important milestone for conservative legal organizations in 2017 by joining the ADF and ECLJ in holding “special consultative status” at the UN’s Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), [which] other ultra-conservative organizations have used... to lobby internationally.”⁵⁴ Ordo Iuris has used its ECOSOC status to bring the EU’s ideological orientation into question by submitting opinions “against the [EU’s] ideological agenda” on issues related to reproductive rights and sexual education.⁵⁵ Ordo Iuris also developed its international contingent in 2017 by establishing a Croatian branch, which is dedicated solely to furthering Croatian national conservative efforts.⁵⁶ The following years saw Ordo Iuris pull away from the Piotr Skarga Foundation, becoming financially independent of the foundation in 2018, and organizational changes minimized the foundation’s potential control of Ordo Iuris’ activities. As Ordo Iuris separated from the Piotr Skarga Foundation, it drew closer to the Polish government, which had become well inundated with PiS’ conservatism. In 2020, journalist Anna Mierzynska, who often reports on Ordo Iuris’ activities, detailed Ordo Iuris’ penetration into PiS power structures, characterizing it as “a speeding machine of political influence.”⁵⁷

Chief among Ordo Iuris’ earlier gambits for sociopolitical influence were its 2019 Ordo Iuris Academy project, a partnership with several Polish universities to train and select interns, and the notoriously homophobic 2019 Local Government Charter of Family Rights, which provided local governments with an ideological and legal framework to discriminate against same-sex couples.⁵⁸ In 2020, Ordo Iuris continued this trend, incorporating the Education for Values Foundation, which is also supported by the NIW’s Centre for Civil Society Development.⁵⁹ The Education for Values Foundation, in turn, was one of the four organizers of Collegium Intermarium’s 2021 opening conference, together with Collegium Intermarium, Ordo Iuris, and the governmental National Institute of Culture and Heritage.⁶⁰ The conference, titled *Intermarium: Space of Freedom and Order*, drew together trans-Atlantic conservative elites and further cemented Ordo Iuris’ influence as an illiberal organization in Central and Eastern Europe. At the conference, over the course of eight hours, these conservative elites reinforced the far-right narratives I have previously detailed, casting the region they refer to as the Intermarium as an idealized conservative homeland where “true Europeans” can live in accordance with natural law.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have detailed the geopolitical and metapolitical events that have been instrumental in Ordo Iuris’ development. Ordo Iuris exists within two overlapping contexts—that of contemporary Central European illiberalism and that of the monarchist Catholic network from which it came. Central European illiberalism is itself a multifaceted movement shaped by the historical treatment of the region by great powers, the resulting resentments, and contemporary influences from the international right. By providing Polish religious conservatives with an organizational model, funding, and connections,

51 Madalena Kopecka, “Warsaw in the center of Europe’s ultra-conservative elite networks,” *VSquare*, February 15, 2024. <https://vsquare.org/warsaw-center-europe-ultra-conservative-networks/>

52 Claudia Ciobanu, “Ordo Iuris: The Ultra-Conservative Organization Transforming Poland,” *Balkan Insight*, June 22, 2021. <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/06/22/ordo-iuris-the-ultra-conservative-organisation-transforming-poland/>.

53 Brakus, “Poland’s Hidden Hand.”

54 Kurasinska, “This ultra-conservative institute has infiltrated the Polish state.”

55 “Ordo Iuris przeciwko ideologicznej agendzie w ONZ—stanowisko na sesję Komisji ds. Ludności i Rozwoju,” *ordoiuris.pl*, November 11, 2022. <https://en.ordoiuris.pl/education/ordo-iuris-against-ideological-agenda-un-position-paper-session-committee-population-and->

56 Datta, “Modern day crusaders in Europe,” 25; see the group’s activity at <https://ordoiuris.hr/>.

57 Anna Mierzynska, “Podboje Ordo Iuris. To rozpedzona maszyna polityczna fundamentalistów,” *Oko*, January 6, 2020. <https://oko.press/podboje-ordo-iuris>.

58 “Local government Charter of the Rights of the Family,” Ordo Iuris, March 29, 2019, <https://en.ordoiuris.pl/family-and-marriage/local-government-charter-rights-family>; Claudia Ciobanu, “A Third of Poland Declared LGBT-Free Zone,” *Balkan Insight*, February 25, 2020. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/02/25/a-third-of-poland-declared-lgbt-free-zone/>

59 Anna Mierzynska, “Ordo Iuris buduje ultrakonserwatywne imperium. Z wpływami daleko poza Polskę,” *Oko*, July 5, 2020. <https://oko.press/ordo-iuris-buduje-ultrakonserwatywne-imperium>

60 Konferencja Intermarium, <https://konferencjaintermarium.pl/en/>.

TFP has significantly impacted contemporary Central European illiberalism, allowing Ordo Iuris to grow and continue to spread its regimented legal conservative influence throughout the region.

Collegium Intermarium and Ordo Iuris represent a particular blend of conservatism within a network of contemporary conservative actors. While Ordo Iuris and its associated organizations have attempted to curtail liberal influence via legal recourse to the natural order, other groups have sought to reinforce their prescriptive worldview by directly attacking what they see as violations of natural law. Identitarians have maintained a focus on metapolitical drift, while paramilitary groups like the American Oath Keepers and the Ukrainian Azov Movement have engaged in both physical and ideological conflicts. With Collegium Intermarium, Ordo Iuris blends politics and metapolitics. As Ordo Iuris attacks sexual and reproductive rights in Poland and abroad, Collegium Intermarium seeks to train the next generation of conservative elites, creating a cadre of lawyers who will continue Ordo Iuris' mission and the mission of the broader Christian right. In my next and final chapter, I explore how the narratives detailed in Chapter 1 were engaged at the May 2021 Intermarium Conference, where international far-right rhetoric was situated specifically within the context of Central and Eastern Europe as an idealized conservative Europe.

In May 2021, Ordo Iuris and Collegium Intermarium brought together conservative academics and lawyers from 12 countries across Europe and the Americas for the Collegium's inaugural conference, titled *Intermarium: Space of Freedom and Order*.¹ Certain prestigious participants were announced as keynote speakers, and others clustered together in four themed panels, respectively titled "Academic Freedom," "Is There a Place for Classical Values in the Postmodern World?," "Economic Integration and Regional Development of Central European Countries," and "The Legal Heritage of Western Civilization in the Modern World." Over the course of the conference, panelists contributed to an overarching narrative of Eurosceptic conservative victimhood.

In the same way that Ordo Iuris has benefited from PiS' influence, Collegium Intermarium is clearly a pet project for Polish conservatives. In a letter read at the Intermarium Conference, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki described Collegium Intermarium as seeking to "create a scholarly community deeply rooted in the tradition and culture of Europe and based on its fundamental values... Roman law, Greek love of truth, and the living heritage of Christianity."² Minister of Education Przemysław Czarnek, who has been widely criticized for his homophobic views and efforts to politicize the Polish education system by "'freeing'... humanities studies from 'political correctness' and 'left-liberal ideology,'" spoke at the conference as well, claiming that "those who fight against Christianity either don't know it or are simply evil."³ Czarnek later quoted John Paul II as saying that "the Europe of the third millennium will either be Christian or will not be at all."⁴ In early 2022, Czarnek allocated 400,000 zloty (roughly \$100,000 USD) to Collegium Intermarium as part of what journalist Agnieszka Miastowska called "the indoctrination of teachers who will be able to carry out lessons in line with the core curriculum introduced by PiS and, above all, in line with the ideas of the Minister of Education."⁵ The value of Collegium Intermarium to Czarnek, to PiS, and to the GCR is precisely in its capacity as an unofficial government organ to create the appearance of social support for conservative goals.

The Intermarium Conference functioned as a platform to advance extreme truth claims that support religious conservative narratives. With a few exceptions, the panelists shared the same set of conservative values. What the conference agenda described as "panels" were, like the rest of the conference, a series of discrete speeches, some of which were pre-recorded. Neither the moderators nor the audience asked the panelists questions, and deviation from a seemingly planned script was frowned upon; for instance, upon receiving a question, one panelist demurred, "I would not refer to the first question... because you did not send [it in advance]."⁶ All of these factors controlled the conference's direction and outcome, creating a space in which truth claims could be advanced without the risk of being challenged. Panelists took advantage of this fact to make dire pronouncements about the state of the modern world, approaching the larger narrative through each panel's lens and claiming that:

- Liberal activists are suppressing Christian values
- Central Europe is the sole repository of European conservative energies
- Collegium Intermarium will restore natural law in Europe

¹ Intermarium Conference, <https://konferencjaintermarium.pl/en/>.

² Morawiecki, Intermarium Conference, 1:23:26.

³ Claudia Ciobanu, "Polish Students Strike Against Education Minister," *Balkan Insight*, December 10, 2020. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/12/10/polish-students-strike-against-education-minister/>; Czarnek, Intermarium Conference, 1:05:32.

⁴ Czarnek, Intermarium Conference, 1:06:34.

⁵ Agnieszka Miastowska, "Minister Czarnek wydal 400 tys. na uczelnie Ordo Iuris. Nauczyciele czekają studia z 'etyki cnót,'" *na:Temat*, March 22, 2022. <https://natemat.pl/402893.czarnek-wydal-400-tys-na-uczelnie-ordo-iuris-nauczyciele-pojda-na-etyke-cnot>.

⁶ Zybortowicz, Intermarium Conference, 3:47:05.

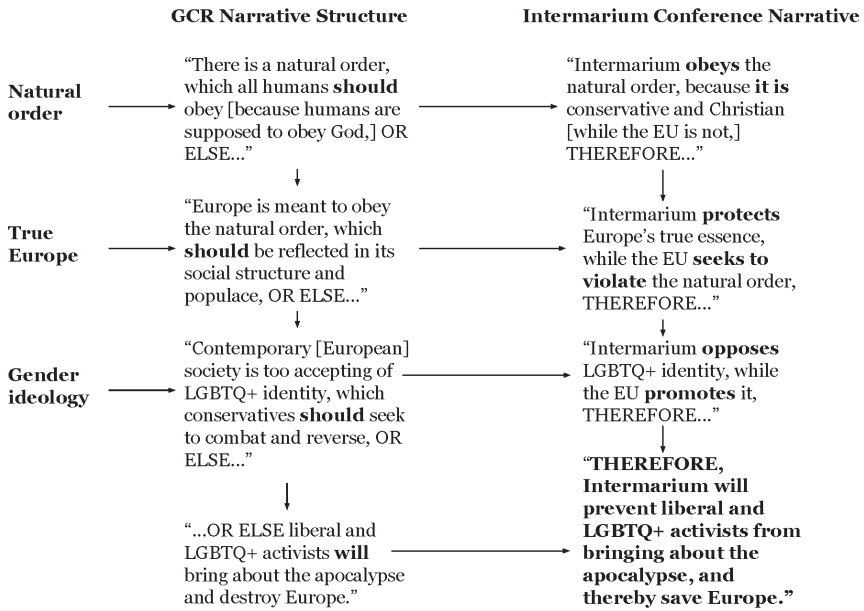


Figure 2: GCR narratives at the Intermarium Conference

The Intermarium Conference presented a united conservative front, with academics whose speeches complemented each other seamlessly like a well-oiled machine. The panelists reiterated central claims about natural law, European society, and gender, weaving the three narratives discussed in Chapter 1 into an expansive argument for conservative Christian Europeans to organize against the LGBTQ+ community and its defenders. In doing so, the speakers engaged the regionally affective narrative of the bulwark myth to create a narrative that localized GCR rhetoric to Central Europe. Even the name of the conference itself was a truth claim in support of conservative Central European exceptionalism: the conference promised an Intermarium that is, literally, a “space of freedom” from challenges to conservative Christian hegemony “and [the natural] order.”

Panel 1: Academic Freedom

The first panel of the conference was largely concerned with the concept of “academic freedom” and its precarious position in the modern world. Speakers used the term “academic freedom” to denote freedoms of speech, expression, and religion within an academic setting, which they claim are under attack by left-wing ideologues, and accused left-wing activists of spreading misinformation about cultural, historical, and biological realities in order to perpetuate and deepen an ongoing process of indoctrination of future generations of European youth.

The panel was stacked with conservative classicists and writers. Moderator David Engels has stated, outside the conference, that future European society “only makes sense on the basis of a positive recourse to the concept of the Christian West and... the *Sacrum Imperium*.”⁷ To this end, he has generated an ideology called “Hesperialism,” so named after the Greek and Roman toponym *Hesperia*, or “western land,” which calls for European nationalist action against immigration and queer communities:

Mass immigration, decline of values, gender mainstreaming, radicalization, parallel societies, party cartels, social polarization, debt crises—wherever one looks, Europe seems to disintegrate before our eyes; politically correct universalism has led us

⁷ Jan Bentz, “David Engels: We Need a ‘Pan-European Conservative Front,’” *The European Conservative*. <https://europeanconservative.com/articles/essay/david-engels-we-need-a-pan-european-conservative-front/>.

to the brink of disaster... we need a Europe that is strong enough to protect the individual Nation State against the rise of China, the demographic explosion of Africa, the difficult relationship with Russia and the radicalization of the Near East... [d]efense of the natural family, severe regulation of immigration, return to Natural Law, protection of a socially responsible economic model, radical implementation of subsidiarity, reinvigoration of the cultural roots of our identity and renewal of our sense of beauty—these are, in short, the pillars of such a new, “Hesperialist” Europe.⁸

Engels’ call for a return to traditional values references racist and white nationalist narratives, presenting the widespread adoption of conservative values as a necessity to prevent white demographic endangerment. He has also provided a theoretical roadmap for its execution. In a favorable profile of Engels’ work, the GCR newspaper *The Hungarian Conservative* describes how he “proposes that the [European] Union should follow the path of the former [Roman] republic and develop a twenty-first-century principality to avoid its downfall. Such an authoritarian, conservative turn could ensure the survival of European (Faustian) civilization.”⁹

Andreas Kinneging, professor of legal philosophy at the University of Leidenburg in the Netherlands, was one of the founders of the Netherlands-based Edmund Burke Foundation and the Center for European Renewal, a pan-European conservative think tank, and was at one point on the advisory boards of both institutions.¹⁰ Notably, several founders of the Center for European Renewal also founded the conservative news outlet *The European Conservative*, in which several conference attendees’ work has been published or reviewed. Michael Sommer, a classicist at the University of Oldenburg, has written about the future of the European Union in comparison to the Roman Empire at its peak, as well as on the threat posed by “woke cancel attempts” to the field of classics, calling the concept of systemic racism “absurd.”¹¹

Rod Dreher, an American expatriate and controversial conservative columnist currently residing in Hungary, wrote for *The American Conservative* for more than 10 years until his blog reportedly became “too weird” for the magnate who funded his column.¹² Dreher now has his own content tag in *The European Conservative*, where he continues to write opinion pieces on “culture war” and geopolitics. The final panelist, John O’Sullivan, has a long history of policy experience, including stints as a speechwriter to Margaret Thatcher and as vice president of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.¹³ O’Sullivan is currently the chair of the Orbán-funded (via the Batthyany Lajos Foundation) Danube Institute, which has closely followed the far-right Fidesz party line and was apparently “called into life in order to provide a gangway to the English-speaking world and borrow respectability from it, in return, by engaging speakers from British and American academe [sic] and public life,” as well as sitting on the editorial board of the *Hungarian Conservative*.¹⁴

The panelists’ discussions of academic freedom require a specific understanding of terms like “ideology” and “ideologization” as references to ideological shifts leftward in global society in recent decades. Throughout the panel, speakers accused a nebulous “left” of politicizing society and academia, thereby marginalizing conservative academics and forcing them to step in as defenders of unbiased academic thought. Though the speakers may have been factually correct in that global society has shifted in the direction of equality and inclusivity, it is important to note that contrary to the panelists’ assertions, society and academia have not *become politicized*; rather, they have *always been politicized*. More

⁸ “Hesperialism,” <https://www.davidengels.be/hesperialism>.

⁹ Barnabas Kurucs, “Handbook for the Decline of the West,” *The Hungarian Conservative*, <https://www.hungarianconservative.com/articles/reviews/handbook-for-the-decline-of-the-west/>; The term “Faustian” is in reference to 20th-century German philosopher Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West*, a work which is often cited by contemporary racists and white nationalists to justify racism and xenophobia. Engels has previously written on Spengler’s life and works.

¹⁰ The Netherlands-based organization seemingly has no relation to the US-based Edmund Burke Institute. Josh Hammer, the moderator of the conference’s economic panel, is a research fellow at the US-based institute.

¹¹ Michael Sommer, “A Tale of Two Cities—Nation State, Empire and the Future of the European Union,” *Hungarian Conservative*, https://www.hungarianconservative.com/articles/opinion/nation_states_empires_tolerance_heterogeneity_french_revolution_eu_layered_identities/; Michael Sommer, “Rettet die Antike vor den Cancel-Versuchen der Woken,” *Welt*, <https://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/plus230945733/Toxische-Maennlichkeit-Rettet-die-Antike-vor-den-Cancel-Versuchen-der-Woken.html>.

¹² Caleb Eearma, “How Rod Dreher’s Blog Got a Little ‘Too Weird’ for *The American Conservative*,” *Vanity Fair*, March 10, 2023, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2023/03/rod-dreher-blog-weird-american-conservative>

¹³ “John O’Sullivan,” National Review Institute, <https://nriinstitute.org/fellows/john-osullivan/>.

¹⁴ “The government-financed Danube Institute and its director, John O’Sullivan,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, <https://hungarianspectrum.org/2020/08/16/the-government-financed-danube-institute-and-its-director-john-osullivan/>; “About,” *Hungarian Conservative*, <https://www.hungarianconservative.com/about/>.

accurately identified, the issue at stake is that dominant narratives today are rapidly changing, and conservative worldviews are no longer unquestionably globally dominant.

The panelists' connections extended beyond similarities of opinion and narrative. Their research has commonly appeared in the same publications, some of which were founded and run by other panelists. Engels identified both Kinneging and O'Sullivan as previous collaborators in the Center for European Renewal, which, as previously stated, founded the conservative news outlet *The European Conservative*, where O'Sullivan and Engels serve on the advisory board.¹⁵ Dreher has also been a fellow with O'Sullivan's Danube Institute since April 2021.¹⁶ As one might expect, these conditions resulted in an echo chamber during the panel, with little narrative development throughout its course. The speakers rarely expanded on each other's themes, often reiterating claims about the nigh-universal endangerment of academic integrity and the need for new, untainted institutions. Reform was impossible, they asserted, due to the extent of corruption and instead called for the creation of new institutions in which academics could remain free.

According to the panelists, the contemporary situation is "essentially rooted in the radicalization of the leftist liberal ideology and its increasing influence on academia," which they described as an ongoing process across all levels of education.¹⁷ Leftists have too aggressively "champion[ed]... the equality of outcome," leading to a situation in which "vacant positions are largely distributed to members of various minorities in order to fulfill the quotas imposed from above," and "every category has a right to proportional representation... if such qualities are lacking, that's proof of discrimination."¹⁸

These complaints were clearly centered around increasing diversity in higher education. The panelists described a distorted, dystopian version of these demographic shifts, framing the presence of members of minority communities in academia as resulting from artificial installation in undeserved positions of intellectual prestige. Employing an academic register, the panelists thus blended popular social anxieties around economic and job security with demographic sensitivities around immigration and identity to produce a narrative that devalued minority populations against a majority defined by exclusion, best understood as those populations for which proportional representation is not discussed. The intended subtext here was the claim that male, white, heterosexual, and/or cisgender populations are being actively discriminated against in society and academia.

Panelists further intensified this claim by following their assertions of demographic manipulation with criticism of contemporary scholarship. O'Sullivan, for instance, argued that while "[o]nly a relatively modest minority possesses either the talent or the passion to be genuine [scholars], [modern] society, with its... egalitarian ethos... seeks to direct more students into scholarly work than are suited to it" in the name of representation, leading to an overall diminishing quality of scholarship.¹⁹ This overproduction of research, they claimed, has yielded:

The creation of college disciplines that are largely dissociated from anything we would normally recognize as the search for truth—disciplines that soon morph into, essentially, propagandistic political activities, in which only one side of an argument is permitted, and dissenters from that argument excluded and marginalized. Most departments of gender studies and culture studies fit into this characterization.²⁰

The panelists divided academic subfields into the old and the new, which were separated by a degree of legitimacy. Gender and cultural studies, they claimed, were newly created subfields, existing "mostly" within the realm of leftist manipulation.²¹ This characterization aimed to weaken the credibility of scholars and scholarship around gender and cultural studies in an effort to bolster the social hegemony of cis-normative and Eurocentric understandings of history and identity—effectively, the panelists framed their rhetorical attacks against liberal academics as defensive measures, portraying the conservative academic community as being fundamentally threatened.

15 Engels, Intermarium Conference, 2:10:37, 2:33:36; "About," *The European Conservative*. <https://europeanconservative.com/about/>

16 "Visiting fellows," Danube Institute. Accessed April 5, 2024. <https://danubeinstitute.hu/en/content/visiting-fellows>

17 Engels, Intermarium Conference, 2:50:29.

18 Kinneging, Intermarium Conference, 2:12:12; Engels, Intermarium Conference, 2:04:53; Kinneging, Intermarium Conference, 2:12:35.

19 O'Sullivan, Intermarium Conference, 2:37:12.

20 O'Sullivan, Intermarium Conference, 2:37:48.

21 The panelists failed to identify any examples of gender and cultural studies existing outside the 'realm of leftist manipulation'; it is unlikely that the initial statement was made in good faith.

Righteous Victimhood

In his speech, Rod Dreher leaned heavily on claims of conservative victimhood, positioning himself as an ideological refugee in Central Europe after being driven from his homeland by an insurmountable series of moral violations. He claimed to “have seen gender ideology, critical social justice, these radical theories, move from the university out into every institution in American society,” such that “we are only a few votes away in the US Congress from transgenderism being written into civil rights law.”²² The panelists consistently accused liberal activists of egregious hypocrisy, equating the propagation of anti-discriminatory viewpoints with pressuring conservatives to publicly disavow their beliefs. In the panelists’ description of the modern world, not only can academics no longer “avoid political appropriation and... conduct non-political research in peace and quiet,” but they “have to put up with having their apolitical stance interpreted as complicity in the continued existence of a system based on white male privilege.”²³ While failing to provide examples of social or academic environments where individuals have been targeted due to their political beliefs or harmed by misinterpretation of their views, the panelists nonetheless characterized contemporary academia as universally endangered by invasive left-wing political activism.

The speakers likened the environment they described to “Communism, of course,” presumably in reference to Stalinist-era purges, suggesting that “everyone not in agreement with these so-called liberals is scared to death, keeps his mouth shut, and, if put under pressure, will betray their convictions and just go along in order to avoid lasting consequences for themselves.”²⁴ In discussing these lasting consequences, the panelists identified punishments such as “being branded as a sexist, racist, homophobic,” although, it was noted, “deplatforming attempts usually target invited speakers, not the professional existence of academics as such.”²⁵ Ultimately, they concluded, perhaps surprisingly, that “the institutional safeguarding of the individual right of academic freedom is still largely effective, despite all prophecies of doom.”²⁶ This statement appears to have been a concession to a more popular worldview and a less controversial narrative. Leaning too heavily on the issues of the academic community could undermine the deliberately crafted claims of “grassroots” identity that drove many speakers’ criticisms of established institutions, such as academia writ large and the United States government.

Even after acknowledging the dearth of conservative cancellations that should, according to their arguments, have been taking place in droves, panelists doubled down on the central narrative of conservative victimhood by purporting the existence of “self-censoring mechanisms within the academic community,” claiming that the very fact “that one has to be aware of such risks points to the uncomfortable truth that the infringement of academic freedom starts... where the spiral of silence is being set in motion because we prefer not to be heroes.”²⁷ Panelists’ assertions that they do not want to be heroes and would prefer to remain apolitical make the most rhetorical sense when interpreted as performative humility to elicit sympathy. The panelists have all been quite clear and public about their views, yet they do not seem to have incurred any penalties or lost their jobs as a result—for example, Kinneging previously received a slap on the wrist for repeated and explicit sexual harassment and remains employed at the same institution.²⁸ In the context of the conference, however, claiming pacifism bolstered the panelists’ broader narrative of conservative victimhood and liberal violence, linking the concept of “academic freedom” to fundamental GCR narratives around liberal obfuscation of truth and the perversion of society.

Freedom From What?

The clearest working definition of “academic freedom” presented at the conference, provided by Michael Sommer, was an academic’s right to “[engage] in research and academic teaching... unharmed by any attempts at infringing on their activities, as long as they are themselves constitutional.”²⁹ Assuming that the speakers used the term “constitutional” to mean “aligning with the legal code of the country in

22 Dreher, Intermarium Conference, 2:30:10-2:30:44.

23 Engels, Intermarium Conference, 2:03:49, 2:05:31.

24 Kinneging, Intermarium Conference, 2:13:07-2:13:31.

25 Kinneging, Intermarium Conference, 2:12:55; Sommer, Intermarium Conference, 2:26:05.

26 Sommer, Intermarium Conference, 2:26:25.

27 Sommer, Intermarium Conference, 2:26:38-2:27:16.

28 Earlier in 2021, Kinneging sexually harassed female students at his home institution, but he only received a reprimand and the matter was closed without investigation, with Kinneging commenting, “It happened. I’d like to put it to rest now. It is very annoying for everyone when you receive such a complaint, including me.” (<https://twitter.com/huffphilip/status/1357985727926185985>)

29 Sommer, Intermarium Conference, 2:21:26-2:21:48.

question,” Rod Dreher’s warning about “transgenderism [being] written into civil rights law” suggested that teaching about diverse gender identities would then become constitutional in the United States. Conversely, if a country’s legal code does not mention, or actively proscribes, transgender identity, it would then follow that teaching about gender identity could be deemed unconstitutional and thus subject to restriction or prohibition by the government.

In their discussion of academic freedom, speakers were careful to represent Collegium Intermarium and the Intermarium Conference as academically and socially respectable institutions—as Sommer clarified, statements considered political or roundly unscientific, such as expressing support “for the Boycott Israel movement... creationism, chemtrails, or the idea that the Earth is flat,” lie outside the bounds of academic freedom, though they should be permitted on the grounds of free speech.³⁰ The speakers claimed that any and all academic work is acceptable “as long as it adheres to a clearly defined set of methodologies,” which the speakers failed to specify.³¹ Within this argument, however, it seems that there is, or should be, space for overlap between and privileging of certain disciplines. Sommer questioned what would happen “if one field of research, say, gender studies, departs from propositions that would be described by experts of another field, biology for example, as utterly unscientific?”³² He had no clear answer, but “the gender studies researcher,” he said, “can claim academic freedom, as long as they stick to a set of rules and methodologies,” which, again, were never clarified.³³ Here, Sommer implied that gender studies researchers do not typically adhere to a coherent methodology through an argument driven by the “gender ideology” narrative, which suggests that gender studies can never be considered a genuinely academic field because it rejects the notion of complementarity.

Having expounded on the problem, the panelists then turned to the solution, which they presented as a dual process—both resistance within the existing structure and the creation of new, ideologically untainted institutions. Conservatives, they said, must “make public the names of those who agitate against [their] freedom [and] move the topic up the topic agenda, as university leaderships will be more pressured to act on [the conservative movement’s] behalf when they realize that there is public awareness.”³⁴ The panelists’ second directive was “to stop trying to shore up the imperium... [and instead] form [their] own institutions, within which [they] can lead a life of virtue,” secluded from the ideologies that silence them.³⁵ Engels called for the creation of these institutions to serve as “a new Carolingian reform,” in reference to the 8th-century Carolingian reforms, which sought to intensify the Catholic faith within the Holy Roman Empire.³⁶ In calling for a new Carolingian reform, Engels appealed to a romanticized European history common in GCR narratives, which imagines an international empire dedicated to the task of protecting the Christian faith and European identity. Institutions like Collegium Intermarium, which are explicitly Christian and conservative, are meant to train the leaders and lawyers of the next generation, who will then have the “correct” understanding of the world and thus implement the “correct” laws.

Other panelists made similar rhetorical assertions about the school’s impact, with Kinning declaring that Collegium Intermarium needs “to teach the young about the truth of so-called liberalism, and of communism. [They] need to teach them that the equality of all... leads to totalitarian tyranny... [They] need to teach them that, in many ways, inequality is a good, or at least an acceptable thing, because it is part and parcel of a good society.”³⁷ In presenting the widespread adoption of social conservatism as a dire necessity, Kinning shored up the conference’s narrative of Collegium Intermarium’s conservative influence by framing it as an effort to ideologically protect future European generations. Ultimately, however, Collegium Intermarium and the Intermarium Conference cannot be fully understood in the context of GCR efforts towards conservative ideological drift in public schooling systems; their intended impact is significantly greater. According to Dreher, Collegium Intermarium, as a higher educational institution, “can train [conservative political] elites... who will move out into the institutions of society and reform society,” backed by the rhetorical and legal power of the GCR.³⁸

All told, the conference’s first panel set the tone for the other three, and the speakers demonstrated the general logical structure of GCR rhetoric, which other panelists reproduced over the course of the

³⁰ Sommer, Intermarium Conference, 2:21:52.

³¹ Sommer, Intermarium Conference, 2:23:06.

³² Sommer, Intermarium Conference, 2:22:40.

³³ Sommer, Intermarium Conference, 2:23:12.

³⁴ Sommer, Intermarium Conference, 2:27:29.

³⁵ Dreher, Intermarium Conference, 2:31:53.

³⁶ Engels, Intermarium Conference, 2:08:57.

³⁷ Kinning, Intermarium Conference, 2:18:01.

³⁸ Dreher, Intermarium Conference, 2:32:53.

conference. The speakers presented liberalism as a pernicious influence on society and conservative Christian morality as truth, localizing the rhetoric by presenting Central Europe as a conservative entity to combat a liberal Western Europe. Although the panelists only briefly discussed the concept of academic freedom that the panel was titled after, their rhetorical move was clear: just as Central Europe was promised to bring conservative change to Europe, Collegium Intermarium would be a haven and training ground for conservative academics and lawyers to reshape the world to their liking.

Panel 2: “Is There a Place for Classical Values in the Postmodern World?”

The second panel presented the previously discussed adversarial relationship between liberalism and conservatism on a larger scale. Panelists addressed the place of classical values in the modern world, which, as the panel’s title suggests, was characterized as “postmodern.” In keeping with overarching GCR narratives, panelists used the term “classical values” to denote acceptance of natural law theory and the law of nations, nationalism, and opposition to all forms of “gender ideology,” while they equated “postmodernity” with the inverse of these classical values. According to the narrative of the second panel, in the postmodern world, liberal values are being forcibly imposed upon Europe in what the speakers identified as an unnatural reversal of the continent’s centuries of Christian ideological domination. The speakers argued that although liberal values are nominally multicultural, modern liberals, in practice, intend to destroy Christianity and the traditional family and create a single European society that fundamentally violates natural law. Over the course of the panel, speakers framed Central Europe as ideologically pure in contrast to a Western Europe infected with liberalism, invoking the “true Europe” narrative and calling on Central European conservatives to combat liberal influence in the European Union.

The panel, larger than the previous, was populated by lawyers, academics, and journalists, all of whom have positioned themselves as experts on culture and morality. The moderator, Stefan Tompson, works for the Polish state-owned media organ TVP World and periodically tweets about Poland’s historical victories, both martial and moral.³⁹ Assertions of Poland’s historical sympathy towards the Jewish community, a staple of the contemporary Polish nationalist narrative, abound on his Twitter.⁴⁰

Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, a historian and director of the Center for Intermarium Studies at the Institute for World Politics in Washington, DC, has garnered significant blowback for his minimization and denial of anti-Semitic violence by Poles during and after World War II.⁴¹ In 2012, Chodakiewicz published a nearly 600-page book, *Intermarium: The Land Between the Black and Baltic Seas*, which presents Poland as the leading regional power in Central and Eastern Europe. In his review of the book, historian Alexander Prusin described Chodakiewicz’ depiction of “the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth [as] the ‘freest’ nation in Europe... [and] Intermarium (that is, Poland writ large)... as a bastion of freedom[, as] more than problematic.”⁴²

Two other panelists, Miklos Szanthy and Istvan Kovacs, lead Hungary’s Center for Fundamental Rights, one of Ordo Iuris’ main international partners, which organized Hungary’s 2023 “anti-woke” CPAC conference.⁴³ Similar to Ordo Iuris’ relationship with PiS in Poland, the center is nominally an NGO but has significant ties to and receives funding from Fidesz.⁴⁴ According to a 2021 tweet from the center’s account, announcing Ordo Iuris’ visit to the center in Budapest, the organizations “aim to preserve and bolster traditional #EuropeanValues & [their] #JudeoChristian heritage.”⁴⁵ Szanthy also heads KESMA, a Hungarian foundation that controls many of the country’s media outlets and is effectively “responsible for ensuring that the 400 some publications under its aegis convey the ‘proper’

39 “The Miracle You’ve Never Heard Of: How Battle of Warsaw Changed History.” *TVP World*, August 14, 2020. <https://tvpworld.com/49409908/the-miracle-youve-never-heard-of-how-battle-of-warsaw-changed-history>; Stefan Tompson (@stefantompson). X, <https://twitter.com/StefanTompson>.

40 https://twitter.com/search?q=%22jew%22%20from%3Astefantompson&src=typed_query&f=top.

41 Graeme Atkinson, “EXCLUSIVE: Trump’s visit to Poland ignites controversy over far-right links,” *HOPeNotHate*, July 5, 2017. <https://hopenothate.org.uk/2017/07/05/trumps-visit-poland-ignites-controversy-far-right-links/>

42 Alexander Prusin, “Review: Intermarium: The Land Between the Baltic and Black Seas,” *Slavic Review* 73, no. 1 (2014): 163–64.

43 Justin Spike, “At CPAC, Hungary’s Orbán decries LGBTQ+ rights, migration.” *AP News*, May 4, 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/cpac-hungary-Orbán-woke-gender-migration-da47dofebc22d935de0b48fe5e3ad4a6>.

44 “How Orbán’s government funds ultra-conservative NGO’s agenda,” *VSquare*, May 7, 2021. <https://vsquare.org/how-Orbáns-government-funds-ultra-conservative-ngos-agenda/>.

45 “We are thrilled to welcome @OrdoIuris in #Budapest. We aim to preserve and bolster traditional #EuropeanValues & our #JudeoChristian heritage. We’re working on expanding our collaboration to include other regional institutes, who might join us next time we meet in lovely #Warsaw.” The Center (@alajogokert), Twitter, April 16, 2021.

messages” in tune with the Fidesz party line.⁴⁶ Kovacs is the founder of Megafon.hu, a government-funded company “established in 2020 to train influencers who could help disseminate government propaganda and to strengthen the voice of those displaying ‘national sentiments’ on social media.”⁴⁷

Chantal Delsol, a conservative Catholic political philosopher, frames her work around the idea of “normative inversions,” referring to the wholesale reversal of sets of societal values that she asserts have taken place multiple times throughout history—one such inversion coming with the Christianization of early Europe and another, which is supposedly approaching, marking the end of the Christian era and a return to paganism. “Violence,” Delsol argues, “is humanity’s natural, animalistic state. Governments punish it, and monotheistic religions domesticate it. But when [Christianity], which held ground as the majority religion, eventually fades, primitive violence reemerges in its own right.”⁴⁸

Another panel participant, political scientist Gladden J. Pappin, has been a polarizing figure since his time at Harvard in the 2000s when he published a letter in the *Harvard Crimson* calling for a reinstatement of the university’s homophobic policies of the 1920s.⁴⁹ After a two-year fellowship with the Fidesz-funded Matthias Corvinus Collegium, Pappin was appointed president of the freshly reorganized, state-run Hungarian Institute for International Affairs, which “has the goal of ‘gathering information from the academic world and international think tanks, disseminating the principles of the Hungarian foreign policy to academic and broader audiences, and actively communicating with the public on international affairs.’”⁵⁰

Uchenna Ekwo, a longtime political journalist, seemed ideologically out of place in the panel, and his contribution engendered conflict. Ekwo sits on the board of directors of the Center for Media and Peace Initiatives, an NGO directed at “foster[ing] critical journalism devoted to peacebuilding and holding practitioners accountable for ethical journalism... peace, dialogue, nonviolence, transparency, and democracy.”⁵¹ While Ekwo’s brief speech at the Internarium Conference touched on the same central concepts of truth and freedom of expression as other panelists and speakers, the conservative narrative underpinning the conference as a whole was conspicuously missing. Ekwo seemingly took aim at the modern American right as he referenced “a kind of corruption of the system, whereby... people talk about alternative facts.”⁵² Whereas other panelists’ calls to action exhorted listeners to bear witness against the liberal canceling of conservatives, Ekwo instead referenced the massively viral video of George Floyd’s death at the hands of Minneapolis police officers, which sparked waves of protests across the United States, as well as naming New York Times journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones’ controversial 1619 Project, which drew Republican ire for reframing American history through the lens of the African-American experience.⁵³ Tension arose during the panel—Polish-American historian Chodakiewicz took umbrage at Ekwo’s mentioning the 1619 Project, calling it “a postmodernist exercise in mendacity... That we are even discussing a racist screed that insinuates that somehow because I’m white, I am responsible for slavery, well—that’s the face of postmodernity, too.”⁵⁴ The panel quickly moved on, but Ekwo’s incongruity was, however briefly, quite visible.

The final panel participant was sociologist Andrzej Zybertowicz, advisor to Polish president Andrzej Duda. Zybertowicz has been called “one of PiS’ principal ideologues,” particularly for his role in the creation and spread of PiS’ narrative of “the system,” which claims that Poland’s post-1989 development “was, in fact, engineered by the communist authorities who had managed to install Security Service informers in key posts in the new Poland... purported to be controlling life in society and the economy

46 “A Fidesz-supported center and its controversial video,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, September 12, 2020. <https://hungarianspectrum.org/2020/09/12/a-fidesz-supported-center-and-its-controversial-video/>.

47 Edit Inotai, “Stop the Presses: Hungary’s Government-Friendly Media Suffers At Home and Abroad,” *Balkan Insight*, January 26, 2023. Also noteworthy from Inotai: “Although Istvan Kovacs, founder of Megafon and strategic director of the government-supportive Center for Fundamental Rights, has denied that Megafon ever received any taxpayer money, the independent news service Telex.hu revealed it is indirectly funded by the Cabinet Office led by Antal Rogan—dubbed the government’s Propaganda Ministry—which channels the money via a civic foundation.” <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/01/26/stop-the-presses-hungarys-government-friendly-media-suffers-at-home-and-abroad/>.

48 Jonathon Van Maren, “The Emergence of a New Paganism: An Interview with Chantal Delsol.” February 18, 2023. <https://europeanconservative.com/articles/interviews/the-emergence-of-a-new-paganism-an-interview-with-chantal-delsol/>.

49 Elizabeth Green, “People in the News: Gladden J. Pappin ‘04.” *The Harvard Crimson*, June 5, 2003. <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2003/6/5/people-in-the-news-gladden-j/>.

50 Ana Luiza Albuquerque, “Hungary’s Plan to Build an Army of U.S. Intellectuals,” *Foreign Policy*, May 19, 2023. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/05/19/hungary-american-conservative-right-wing-intellectuals-Orbán/>.

51 “About Us,” Center for Media and Peace Initiatives, <https://www.mycmpi.org/about/>. Accessed November 6, 2023.

52 Ekwo, Internarium Conference, 3:27:33.

53 Schwartz, Sarah, “Lawmakers Push to Ban ‘1619 Project’ From Schools,” *EducationWeek*, February 3, 2021. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/lawmakers-push-to-ban-1619-project-from-schools/2021/02>.

54 Chodakiewicz, Internarium Conference, 3:59:18-4:00:22.

of the Third Polish Republic from behind the scenes.⁵⁵ Zybortowicz, who has received significant criticism from the wider sociological community for unsound scholarship, brought an unexpectedly sobering voice to the panel.⁵⁶ The conference up until his panel, he said, featured “many declarations related to ideology and religion more than scientific analysis,” a tactic which, he warned, would likely lead Collegium Intermarium to failure.⁵⁷ The Collegium’s mission, Zybortowicz said, is to restore science, which “has really been damaged and ruined,” in order to deconstruct such postmodern falsities as “education of gender, LGBT transgender... this trend of revolution, the liberal gender revolution would not survive this shock with... science.”⁵⁸ Christianity, he said, is a necessity in the times to come, and though one can “be religiously indifferent [or] a non-believer... we should really doubt his humanity if [a person] cannot see the message of humanity [in the image of Mary and Jesus].”⁵⁹ Zybortowicz gestured toward religious tolerance by stating that one “can be religiously indifferent,” but his statement was both deceptive and ultimately dehumanizing, as it implied that failure to adequately demonstrate appreciation for Christian symbolism should invite suspicion and alienation on the grounds that the individual in question might be inhuman. As an othering tactic, this is both efficient and effective. Questioning an individual’s humanity calls the entirety of their faculties into doubt—are people who might be inhuman capable of rational thought? This construction justifies paternalistic intent and, within the context of the panelists’ calls for societal overhaul, indicates a potential justification for the installation of control structures of the very kind against which panelists railed.

The Old and the New

As panelists identified and discussed classical values, a pattern began to emerge—classical values preserve the historical social status quo while postmodern values challenge it. At the same time, classical values are grounded in Christianity, and postmodern values are not. In his speech, Istvan Kovacs linked the choice to subscribe to classical values to a three-part European identity:

Like a staircase of three different steps... on the first step, the first level of identity is the relationship between the individual and the transcendent. On the second level, which is built on the first one, is the relationship between the individual and its smallest circle of individuals—the family. And the third step, which is built on the first and the second one, is the relationship between the individual and the greater circle—the greater one is like a nation-state, in Europe... the European identity is like—of course, the first step is Christianity, the relationship between the individual and the Holy Trinity. Of course, the second step is the relationship between the individual and his family, so the Christian family—a woman, a man, and their children.... And the third step is the nation-state... and all the values which are identified as classical values are around these three steps... our values... are superior because they can be driven back to the truth, and to me, the truth is God because he himself declared that, you know, “I am the truth,” and all of the values which I would identify like classical values can be driven back to God, and the problem with modern values is that they cannot.⁶⁰

With this speech, Kovacs provided an efficient summary of the Intermarium Conference narrative and contextualized the panelists’ normative usage of the term “classical values,” which largely mirrored their usage of the term “truth”—both denote a particular set of values and beliefs that align with GCR social goals. By referring to classical values or asserting that an individual subscribes to them, the panelists could efficiently associate an individual with Christianity, heterosexuality, and cisgender identity. More often, speakers referred to people and populations who do not ascribe to classical values or are ignorant of the truth. Where belief in classical values indicated adherence to lifestyles in alignment with GCR morality, belief in modern (or postmodern) values represented a life misdirected, founded on false (by dint of not being sufficiently conservative and Christian) premises.

55 Piotr Oseka, “The Bolek Affair: Or, Kiszczak’s Cupboard and the Meaning of History,” *Cultures of History Forum*, May 24, 2016. <https://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/politics/the-bolek-affair>.

56 Adam Leszczyński, “Tropi układ czytając gazety - metoda badawcza prof. Andrzeja Zybortowicza,” *Oko.press*, September 28, 2017. <https://oko.press/tropi-uklad-czytajac-gazety-metoda-badawcza-prof-andrzeja-zybertowicza>.

57 Zybortowicz, Intermarium Conference, 3:47:55.

58 Zybortowicz, Intermarium Conference, 3:52:32-3:53:49.

59 Zybortowicz, Intermarium Conference, 3:54:48.

60 Kovacs, Intermarium Conference, 3:34:03-3:36:38.

Gladden Pappin later expanded on Kovacs' contraposing tradition with modernity by contrasting innovation with preservation.⁶¹ By and large, Pappin claimed, innovation is destructive, born out of ignorance of tradition, as though new institutions and ways of thinking seek to reject and replace tradition rather than augment or enhance its function in the modern world. The sole exception, he claimed, is the act of conversion to Christianity, representing innovation in a positive direction, or "the quality of genuine newness and innovation... leaving behind the things of the world, and turning toward God."⁶² Conversely, liberal actors perpetuate only negative innovation, moving further from the values of the past. Panelists warned that this negative innovation is, inevitably, to be universally imposed "on all of society, on all our societies... Concepts like faith, God, family, common sense, normality, success, and authority are simply incomprehensible in the postmodern political context."⁶³ The implication of this line of argument was that concepts like Christianity and heterosexuality, supposedly incomprehensible to the denizens of postmodernity, will be the valuable things lost or destroyed in the face of reckless innovation until the notion of Europe the panelists envisioned is gone forever.

The key point of this constructed contrast between old and new is its dual utility as a call to action and an opportunity to bear witness. Panelists asserted their beliefs that classical values are eternal and unshakeable, yet they discussed the urgency of their protection as though they were fragile and at risk of destruction. This binary understanding of classical values is similar to a binary pattern of future-casting panelists posited throughout the conference—either Europe will be purely Christian and conservative, or Christianity and conservatism will be erased from Europe and the world. According to the panelists, this second option will inevitably lead to the destruction of the traditional family and traditional conceptions of gender. Speakers framed this claim partially as a result of the decline of academia discussed in the first panel, as "the young generation is... taken out of tradition, and it can turn out that it does not matter if a nation has 300 years of tradition" in the face of destructive postmodernism.⁶⁴ This erasure of tradition, which the panelists treated as equivalent to the wholesale erasure of Christianity, became a central warning at the conference, as Christianity, the panelists argued, constitutes the foundation for all classical values. In a society divorced from Christian norms and values, "our values around family [will have] suddenly lost their basis... if there's no God and there's no creation... it cannot be true that God created man to be men and women... everyone can decide whether he wants to [be] something else."⁶⁵

This warning, delivered by Kovacs, is doubly intriguing. First, he linked cisgender identity again to Christianity by tethering God's existence to the existence of binary gender, which reinforces panelists' arguments around the necessity of Christian social domination. Second, Kovacs framed the concept of self-determination in relation to gender as a possibility that only arises in the absence of God and Christianity. At a conference whose title invokes the concept of freedom, it seems strange to rail against self-determination. Kovacs' statement leaned more towards the "order" that Collegium Intermarium was promised to produce, indicating that in the conference's projected future, allowable ways of life and freedom will be limited to those that exist within the parameters of Christian morality.

Taking Up the Sword

After enumerating the supposed dangers of postmodernity, several panelists turned to the question of what should be done to restore classical values to their proper place—in other words, to reinforce the natural order. This concluding section of the panel constructed a messianic narrative on two levels, with both Collegium Intermarium and the Intermarium region cast as saviors.

Szantho was particularly vocal in this regard. According to him, Collegium Intermarium serves to "light the way for Europe or, at the very least, Central Europe."⁶⁶ Central Europe is special because, within the conference's narrative, it is the last part of Europe to escape corruption: "What is left of Europe can be found only in Central Europe. There is an energy here that can still resist the non-Europe of today."⁶⁷ With this narrative, Szantho flipped the script on core-periphery perceptions of Europe—Central Europe is not "less developed" but the guardian of the old ways. This second facet of the narrative required Szantho, speaking on behalf of the conference participants, to claim Central

61 Pappin, Intermarium Conference, 3:42:00.

62 Pappin, Intermarium Conference, 3:43:36.

63 Szantho, Intermarium Conference, 3:01:52.

64 Zybortowicz, Intermarium Conference, 3:49:50.

65 Kovacs, Intermarium Conference, 3:37:52.

66 Szantho, Intermarium Conference, 3:00:10.

67 Szantho, Intermarium Conference, 3:08:13.

European history as exclusively *theirs*, such that he and the other panelists could refer to the region in collective, possessive terms—*we, us, ours*—thus claiming to speak for the region. This line of argumentation is inherently reactionary, engaging regional anxieties around European identity and belonging, as discussed in Chapter 2. By proactively asserting that Central Europe is, in fact, the “most European” part of Europe, Szanthono addressed common insecurities, drawing another link between a conservative Intermarium and the GCR and aggressively claiming a degree of power and influence for the region and its representatives.

In opposition to postmodernity, Szanthono claimed, the states of a conservative Intermarium will stand for “a better and freer Europe, and reject the deeper, but less meaningful, integration advanced by the other side,” exemplified by the European Union.⁶⁸ In this process, Szanthono referenced the Central European experience under Soviet occupation—a potent rhetorical device due to its emotional charge—to portray the region as the people’s hero, ready to rise up and overthrow tyranny:

Thanks to all the difficulties and tragedies we faced throughout the decades-long suffering under the yoke of dictatorships, we have grown strong. We have grown accustomed to attempts to silence us, to push us underwater completely. What we have, we have worked for. We have rebuilt our nations again and again. We have fought and died for our homelands, but thanks to all of that, we are aware of what we have, we know what we have to lose, and we realize that Europe, which means all of us, is worth fighting for.⁶⁹

By connecting the Soviet Union to the European Union, Szanthono cast contemporary Central European conservatives as the ideological heirs to anti-communist freedom fighters. The argument that Europe is worth fighting for suggests that there is going to *be* a fight, and Szanthono’s call to action encouraged the audience to see it as their responsibility to combat activities that threaten Europe, lest they fail to adequately live up to their inheritance. The fight in question could unfold in multiple arenas: while the panelists would likely align with the intellectual wing of any “European defense” army, right-wing extremist movements across Europe could easily interpret the conference’s messages as a call to physical action.

Others made similar claims throughout the panel. Zybortowicz, for instance, warned that “in today’s world, those who are against the classical truth have a lot of weapons. They are numerous, and from this point of view, it’s good that the first major faculty of this university is the law because... we have the law to fight, and we use its tools.”⁷⁰ This is a key strength of the Christian conservative argument—the Western legal canon *is* founded on Christian principles and, given the (somewhat redundant) conservative predilection for conservation over innovation, it provides a great many ready-made tools and a built-in justification for their exclusive use; they are superior to newer, more liberal legal structures precisely *because* they are products of antiquity. Just as recourse to older resources signals virtue within GCR narratives, newer methodologies, arguments, and ideas can be immediately written off as products of modernity, intrinsically corrupted by the time and place of their creation.

In another appeal to antiquity, Chodakiewicz suggested that, among other options, “we can give a general call to a Reconquista—an all-out, multidimensional effort or a gradual premeditated one.”⁷¹ Chodakiewicz’s use of the term Reconquista, referring to the medieval expulsion of the Muslim Umayyad Caliphate from the Iberian Peninsula, is illuminating. In light of the European migration crisis beginning in 2015, the invocation of the “Reconquista” resonates with contemporary anti-Muslim sentiments and associated acts of violence against immigrants of color. Indeed, as Tiago João Queimada e Silva notes, Reconquista “has ceased to be an ideological construction restricted to the Iberian Peninsula and has become a transcendental symbol for extremist nationalist movements all around Europe,” such as the Identitarian movement.⁷² For example, radical right Ukrainian forces have coopted the term as well, constructing their own Ukraine-centric Intermarium narrative that attacks EU leadership and rejects EU member status. The far-right party National Corps, which represents a political gambit for social legitimation by the neo-Nazi Azov Regiment, has wielded the term to indicate “a struggle which would culminate in the Reconquista of ‘Paneuropa’ from the clutches of ‘neo-

68 Szanthono, Intermarium Conference, 3:02:45.

69 Szanthono, Intermarium Conference, 3:05:39.

70 Zybortowicz, Intermarium Conference, 3:48:24.

71 Chodakiewicz, Intermarium Conference, 4:03:51.

72 Tiago João Queimada e Silva, “The Reconquista revisited: Mobilising medieval Iberian history in Spain, Portugal and beyond,” in *The Crusades in the Modern World*, ed. Mike Horswell and Akil N. Awan. Routledge, 2019.

Bolshevik Russia’ and [the] ‘multicultural EU.’”⁷³ Ultimately, the term “has become a mobilizational icon in the far-right’s quixotic struggle for the ‘reconquest’ of the essence of an idealized Europe.”⁷⁴ So, while Chodakiewicz deployed the term flippantly, in a seemingly offhanded manner, it, in fact, signals deeply xenophobic, violent narratives, ones that an avowed conservative and career historian like Chodakiewicz would be well aware of.

The essence of the conference’s second panel, then, was this: panelists engaging rhetoric that consistently implied, but never quite pronounced, a call to action in defense of the “classical values” that they associated with the Intermarium region. The panel’s narrative answered the implied question of its title—Is There a Place for Classical Values in the Postmodern World?—by presenting the “place” of classical values in the “postmodern” world as both a metaphorical place and a physical location. Metaphorically, the speakers claimed, classical values have been subverted from their rightful place of superiority in accordance with the “natural order” narrative. Physically, classical values are located in the land and the people of Central Europe. The subsequent panel built on this structure by presenting a Central Europe motivated by classical values as a strategy to attack and diminish liberal ideological influence within the European Union.

Panel 3: Economic Integration and Regional Development of Central and Eastern Europe

The third panel of the conference, which centered on Central European regional economics and development, seemed out of place compared to the other panels’ topics of academic freedom, classical values, and Western legal heritage. Participants of the third panel were similarly eclectic, including a cultural heritage scholar, an American opinion columnist, and the Secretary of State for the Hungarian Ministry of Family. Individually, the speakers largely focused on their own countries and their respective relationships with Poland. Together, however, the panel participants developed a narrative of Central and Eastern European economic exceptionalism that merged with existing “soft Eurosceptic” narratives propagated by Hungarian and Polish illiberal leaders.

Speakers used discussions of regional economics and cooperative initiatives to characterize the Intermarium region as economically successful and culturally harmonious, linking these traits to expressions of the “true Europe” narrative that functioned within the space of the conference to reinforce claims of a conservative Central and Eastern Europe as superior to liberal Western Europe. With the preceding panels framing the conference’s narrative around Intermarium as a bastion of conservative Christianity and “classical values” aligned with the “true Europe” narrative, the third panel introduced Euroscepticist sentiments, as panelists suggested that Intermarium’s economic power and influence, coupled with intensive regional cooperation, could enable the region to resist unwelcome directives from Brussels and potentially shift the balance of power within the European Union.

The panel’s moderator was American conservative commentator and director of the *Newsweek* opinion section Josh Hammer. Hammer, who “repeatedly argues for using wielding state power to enforce what he describes as conservative values... [and] enact revenge on political opponents,” has attended several other notable GCR events, such as the New York Young Republican Club’s (NYYRC) 2022 gala, which brought together “white nationalists... leaders from extreme far-right European parties like Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*, AfD), whom German officials placed under surveillance for their ties to extremism, and Austrian Freedom Party (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, FPÖ),” along with extremist Republican figureheads like Marjorie Taylor Greene and Steve Bannon.⁷⁵

Hammer’s friend and collaborator Matthew Tyrmand, a conservative American economist who sits on the editorial board of *The European Conservative*, was also in attendance. Tyrmand, who has been characterized as “part of the global war by the right wing against democracy,” was removed from the NYYRC’s board of directors in 2023 following accusations that Tyrmand had gotten the founder of

⁷³ Queimada e Silva, “The Reconquista revisited.”

⁷⁴ Queimada e Silva, “The Reconquista revisited.”

⁷⁵ Edison Hayden, “Newsweek Embraces the Anti-Democracy Hard Right.” For more on Hammer’s affinity for using state power to achieve right-wing ends, see: Josh Hammer, “The Only Path Forward is National Conservatism.” *The American Conservative*, November 5, 2021. <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/the-only-path-forward-is-national-conservatism/>.

the far-right American nonprofit organization Project Veritas, where he had previously been a board member, unjustly fired.⁷⁶

Gergely Ekler, who was then Hungary's Secretary of State for Family Policy, now serves as the curator of Hungary's Pro-Family Foundation, established by Fidesz-nominated Katalin Novak during her tenure as Hungarian president.⁷⁷ Dora Szucs is the international director for Matthias Corvinus Collegium (MCC) in Budapest, a Fidesz-affiliated institution that employed Gladden Pappin and aims to court young Hungarians with "the power to pluck [them] from obscurity and elevate [them] to the international playing field... [expecting] alignment to its right-wing politics in return."⁷⁸ In her speech, Szucs described MCC and Collegium Intermarium as similar institutions, which "encourage [their] students to take responsibility and action for the benefit of not only their immediate environment, but also their nation and, more broadly speaking, their region."⁷⁹ Cultural heritage scholar Katarzyna Smyk attended the Intermarium Conference as a representative of the National Institute of Rural Heritage and Culture, part of Piotr Gliński's Ministry of Culture. Similarly to Szucs, Smyk's speech promoted regional solidarity and cooperation, framing "tradition as an important factor of integration and regional development."⁸⁰

Several Polish economic officials also sat on the panel. Tadeusz Koscinski was, at the time of the conference, Poland's Minister of Finance. He resigned in 2022 after a tax reform bill backfired, with PiS chairman Jaroslaw Kaczynski later suggesting that the bill was poorly handled, "maybe... due to a lack of sufficient qualifications, maybe also due to a lack of goodwill" from responsible officials.⁸¹ Piotr Patkowski was the Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Finance from 2020 until PiS' electoral loss in 2023 when he left his position to take the presidency of the Polish Audit Oversight Agency (PANA).⁸² This transition prompted serious questioning of Patkowski's fitness for the role in light of PiS' unorthodox promotion practices, and in early 2024, he was removed from the position by new Minister of Finance Andrzej Domanski, who stated that Patkowski "does not have the competences necessary to perform such an important function for the Polish economy."⁸³ Pawel Jablonski, who was the Undersecretary of State for Economic and Development Cooperation at the time, entered the Polish government in 2018 as an advisor to PiS Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and was elected the Polish plenipotentiary for the Three Seas Initiative in 2020, a position in which Jablonski represented Poland in international cooperation.⁸⁴

The panel's final participant, Sviatoslav Yurash, is a conservative Ukrainian politician with links to the World Congress of Families and Ukraine's neo-Nazi Azov Battalion.⁸⁵ Yurash, who has served as a People's Deputy in Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Servant of the People party since 2019, has founded two conservative cross-party groups in Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada—the first, "Values, Dignity, Family," seeks to protect "traditional values" in Ukrainian society, while the second, "Intermarium," aims at the "politico-economic, value-cultural, and martial-defense unity of our region."⁸⁶ In January of 2020, Yurash stated, "I am a supporter of traditional values. In my youth, I went through all the stages of deconstructivist foolishness, relativist banality, and other destructive frivolities. Luckily—I grew."⁸⁷

76 "Update on the Club's Board of Advisors," New York Young Republican Club, February 21, 2023. <https://nyyrc.com/news/update-on-the-clubs-board-of-advisors/>; Vanessa Gera, "Polish journalist wins legal battle against US activist," *Associated Press*, May 20, 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/world-news-donald-trump-europe-journalists-government-and-politics-9cb9a543a95d89b34f9a56ce8b8e6c69>.

77 "About Us," Pro-Family Foundation (*Családpárti Alapítvány*). Accessed April 5, 2024. <https://csaladpartialapitvany.hu/en/about-us/>; Before her 2022-2024 tenure as president, Novak organized the World Congress of Families 2017 Budapest summit.

78 Bence Szechenyi, "Viktor Orbán's pet university is all about propaganda—I know, I was there," *The Guardian*, September 11, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/sep/11/viktor-orban-university-propaganda-london>

79 Szucs, Intermarium Conference, 7:02:18.

80 Smyk, Intermarium Conference, 6:49:06.

81 "Polish finance minister resigns over poor handling of tax reform," *IntelliNews*, February 8, 2022. <https://www.intellinews.com/polish-finance-minister-resigns-over-poor-handling-of-tax-reform-234251/>

82 "Piotr Patkowski został powołany na prezesa PANA," *BANK.pl*, November 14, 2023. <https://bank.pl/piotr-patkowski-zostal-powolany-na-prezesa-pana/>

83 "Odwolałem pana Piotra Patkowskiego ze stanowiska Prezesa Polskiej Agencji Nadzoru Audytowego. Pan Patkowski nie posiada kompetencji niezbędnych do pełnienia tak ważnej dla polskiej gospodarki funkcji." Andrzej Domański (@Domanski_Andrz). January 26, 2024. https://twitter.com/Domanski_Andrz/status/1750818615018852541.

84 Adrian Misiak, "Who is a Polish government plenipotentiary for the Three Seas Initiative?" *New Europe*, July 18, 2021. <https://neweurope.info/who-is-a-polish-government-plenipotentiary-for-three-seas-initiative/>

85 Morris van de Camp, "Our Lady in Kyiv," *Counter Currents*, March 7, 2022. <https://counter-currents.com/2022/03/our-lady-in-kyiv/>.

86 Viktoria Narizhna, "«Tsinnosti, hidnist', rodyna: tryvohzni rosdumy z vidtinkom lyuti.» 50%, January 20, 2021. <https://50vidotsktiv.org.ua/tsinnosti-gidnist-rodyna-tryvohzni-rozdumy-z-vidtinkom-lyuti/>; Sviatoslav Yurash, "Intermarium... Kryvavi zemli, Bozhe irysheche..." Facebook, September 30, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/100000911390756/posts/490153709884960/?app=fbl>.

87 Sviatoslav Yurash, "Kamin' aut ('Coming out')." Facebook, January 17, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/sviatoslav.yurash/posts/3845813342125674>

Two months later, Yurash and pro-Russian politician Oleg Voloshyn, another leader of the cross-party group, met with Brian Brown, head of the World Congress of Families, during Brown's visit to Ukraine.⁸⁸ Yurash later spoke at a December 2021 conference organized by the ultra-conservative Ukrainian Intermarium Support Group, which brought together conservative ideologues and white supremacists from the Intermarium region.⁸⁹

It is noteworthy that in a panel about regional cooperation, the majority of panelists discussed and were seemingly motivated by their own national interests. Within the context of the GCR as a constantly shifting network, this suggests that the Intermarium Conference exemplified opportunistic collaboration against a shared enemy, in this case, liberalism writ large and the European Union. At the same time, though, the conference evidenced lasting relationships, positions of power, and mid-to-long-term alliances within the international right. Multiple speakers referenced Poland and Hungary as global examples of conservative governance and asserted that their own countries' conservative factions were emulating the Polish and Hungarian models, seemingly to curry favor with the illiberal powerhouses at the conference.

Old Friends and New Enemies

Panelists presented the Intermarium countries as bonded by historical experience. Ekler asserted that "if the collective unconscious exists, the thousand-year-old connection between our countries or our nations must have an imprint in our collective unconscious."⁹⁰ This collective unconscious, in Hammer's view, is exemplified by "a more traditionalist strand of freedom, a freedom based around national identity, based around love of one's own culture, trying to preserve one's own heritage."⁹¹ Hammer personified the Intermarium region as a suffering figure, much like its conservative inhabitants, contrasting it with "Western liberals on both sides of the Transatlantic alliance," who he charged with neglecting the region and ignoring its potential.⁹² While it was not unusual for panelists to argue for connections among the Intermarium countries in the context of the panel, it is worth highlighting that, despite speakers elaborating on a romanticized vision of a Central Europe united across as a rationale for continued closeness, there was no discussion of the contemporary tensions around borders, security, and geopolitical alignment that strain relationships in Central Europe.

According to the panel's narrative, integration has been and remains the best way to continue protecting the region and its mission. Smyk supported this argument further, drawing on the "natural order" narrative's concept of the common good to present conservative regional integration as a communal responsibility. She argued that "intangible heritage, like heritage in general, is defined in terms of... a common good, and this implies a positive valorization of any pro-integration activities formed and realized around heritage."⁹³ In claiming the protection of cultural heritage as a conservative Central European virtue, Smyk engaged part of the "true Europe" narrative that characterizes liberal Western forces, most notably the European Union, as homogenizing Europe at the cost of discrete national cultures. The panelists' warnings about cultural homogenization at the hands of the European Union, or liberalism more broadly, consistently centered on assertions that dominant powers would force liberalism on Central Europe. The only path to combat this, they claimed, was through the aggressive proliferation of conservatism.

Jablonski presented the spread of Central European conservatism as a prerequisite for all of Europe's future prosperity, arguing that:

Europe cannot develop without geographical and ideological balance... the main public discourse in many countries of the European Union is dominated by one order: a liberal, left-wing one. There is often a lack of a strong conservative voice, which was at the foundation of European integration and which led to the creation of United Europe seven decades ago, the idea which guided Robert Schuman, one of the founding fathers of the EU, to enable Europe, as an association of free, equal,

88 Tetiana Kozak, "Yak amerykans'ki actyvisty dopomahayut' obmanyuvaty ukrainins'kykh zhinok shchodo abortiv," *openDemocracy*, March 18, 2020. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/ukrainian-women-misled-abortion/>.

89 "Chetverta onlajn-konferentsiia hrupi spriannya rozbudovi Intermariumu vidbulasya v Kyevi," *Intermarium*, December 21, 2021. <https://intermarium-support.com/chetverta-onlajn-konferenciya-grupy-spryannya-rozbudovi-intermariumu-vidbulasya-v-kyevi/>

90 Ekler, Intermarium Conference, 6:37:37.

91 Hammer, Intermarium Conference, 6:34:47.

92 Hammer, Intermarium Conference, 6:33:35.

93 Smyk, Intermarium Conference, 6:50:45.

and independent nations, to develop in peace and cooperation, in economic and cultural balance and mutual respect for our traditions.⁹⁴

With this argument, Jablonski continued the narrative of the preceding panels, framing liberalism as a limiting factor in European development and implying that its very presence in Europe threatens freedom, equality, and independence. In Jablonski's argument, while Western Europe may be infected with liberalism, the Intermarium Conference was a testament to Central Europe's retained relative purity and geopolitical power. Because of conservative influence in the region, including institutions like Collegium Intermarium, "Central Europe is a place where a debate will be forged about the future of our continent."⁹⁵

Existing Powerhouse or Emerging Market?

Despite criticizing Western Europe and the European Union, panelists nevertheless framed their arguments within the language of democratic processes. This served as evidence of the conference's "soft" Euroscepticism since panelists did not reject the European Union wholesale. Instead, they indicated a wish, or need, to change its ideological polarization in order to reap the benefits of EU membership without suffering the consequences of ideological conflicts, much like Poland and Hungary have encountered in recent years. Smyk, seemingly preempting criticism, asserted that ways of life centered around cultural heritage protection are "compatible with human rights and the principles of sustainable development."⁹⁶ She framed cultural heritage protection as European communities taking their fate and future into their own hands, arguing that "the aforementioned communities of good, formed around folk traditions, will thus be the communities that strengthen the sense of values and the system of values," rather than the EU's external enforcement.⁹⁷ Smyk's argument illustrated a contradiction common in populist rhetoric, which the conference reproduced from the GCR and PiS alike: conservatism is simultaneously characterized as a grassroots movement directed against a corrupt elite *and* as an intellectually elite movement dedicated to increasing its own influence. The third panel attempted to resolve this contradiction by suggesting the removal of the corrupt elite, exemplified by the EU, from power and the installation of a true elite—the conservative Intermarium—in its place.

It is within this context that panelists discussed regional economics, focusing on Central Europe's purported prosperity in comparison to Western Europe. Speakers focused heavily on rapid GDP growth by percentages, with Kosciński stating that "in the first two decades of the 21st century, the V4 [Visegrád] countries roughly doubled their GDP per capita, whereas for all the other 27 EU member states, there was an increase of only about 20% recorded in the same period."⁹⁸ In a similar vein, Ekler asserted that the "V4 countries, with their 2-5% annual GDP growth, growth exceeding the level of the EU 27 average, have become the economic powerhouse of the European Union."⁹⁹ This logic is dubious. Central Europe's astronomical GDP growth in the early 21st century reflects economic prosperity resulting largely from regional developments in the decade after the fall of communism. Presenting this growth in percentages allowed the panelists to inflate Central Europe's economic success, a rhetorical move that supported their larger narrative of Central European exceptionalism.

Here, I will make a brief digression to contextualize the panelists' claims about Central European economic prosperity. The following chart, sourced from the World Bank, compares GDP per capita in the Euro area with those of the V4 countries from 2000 to 2020.

94 Jablonski, Intermarium Conference, 7:34:54.

95 Jablonski, Intermarium Conference, 7:33:09.

96 Smyk, Intermarium Conference, 6:49:57.

97 Smyk, Intermarium Conference, 6:52:26.

98 Kosciński, Intermarium Conference, 6:44:40.

99 Ekler, Intermarium Conference, 6:39:07.

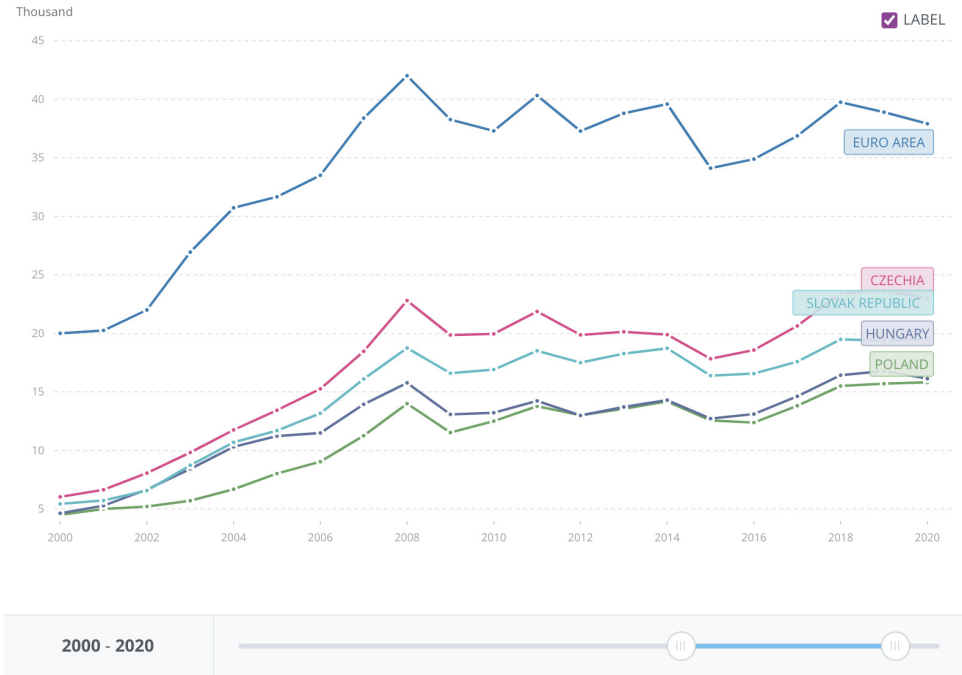


Figure 3: Year-to-year GDP per capita of the V4 countries compared to the Euro area.

In contrast to Ekler’s claims of V4 countries’ economic superiority, contemporary economists frame V4 economic growth since EU accession as a process of convergence with, rather than outpacing of, the greater EU economic space, noting that V4 economic competitiveness will continue to depend on the competitiveness and export success of the European Union overall.¹⁰⁰ The economist Tyrmand said as much in his speech on the panel, describing the region as “an emerging market” and noting that “on a per capita basis, though, it is lagging greatly with the Western European Union and European Monetary Union countries. The per capita GDP in the Three Seas is \$17,000 [USD]... versus the EU average, which is \$35,000, so it’s about half.”¹⁰¹ Tyrmand, however, was the minority, and no other panelist questioned Central Europe’s economic superiority within the European Union. Instead, the panel moved on to the question of how to use this advantage—as Ekler put it, “We tend to share the same ideas and interests, and it seems that, nowadays, we are capable of articulating them jointly. But what do we use economic success for?”¹⁰²

In Tyrmand’s view, economic cooperation will improve “border security, which obviously has been at risk in multiple arenas, coming from the third world with the migration crisis, coming from our foreboding neighbor to the east,” and this increased security will, in turn, attract foreign investors, thereby further increasing regional capital.¹⁰³ Koscinski approached the topic from a perspective of national interest to state that “the successful economic integration of the Central and Eastern Europe region is an important foreign policy objective for Poland.”¹⁰⁴ Patkowski echoed this sentiment, highlighting energy dependence as he noted that “this kind of collaboration makes us independent, both from the West and from the East, but I think we’re... more concerned with the East.”¹⁰⁵

Predictably, the panel’s Hungarian participants made no mention of divestment from Russia as a driving force in regional cooperation. Szucs, as a representative of MCC, focused largely on education.

100 Vladimir Balaž, Katarina Karasová, and Allan M. Williams, “The V4 Countries and the EU: A Comparative Perspective,” in *A Quarter Century of Post-Communism Assessed* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017): 129-159.

101 Tyrmand, Intermarium Conference, 7:10:45, 7:13:49.

102 Ekler, Intermarium Conference, 6:40:24.

103 Tyrmand, Intermarium Conference, 7:14:26.

104 Koscinski, Intermarium Conference, 6:43:47.

105 Patkowski, Intermarium Conference, 7:29:32.

She noted that “when it comes to our [regional] elite, we have a huge challenge to overcome, which is the brain drain phenomenon... We will not be able to preserve our strength and our ability to grow without finding a way to keep our talents in the region.”¹⁰⁶ However, it was deemed imperative that the younger generations of Central Europe be educated in the right ways—“during those formative years, it is crucially important which values and larger vision we convey to our youth.”¹⁰⁷ MCC, which is “part Fidesz propaganda machine, part private university... [and which] specializes in bringing ‘canceled’ Anglo-American academics and journalists into its fold,” provides a Hungarian model for the potential future of conservative education.¹⁰⁸ Szucs’ presence at the Intermarium Conference suggested the aspirations of Collegium Intermarium’s leadership to reproduce this model; however, as of October 2024, Collegium Intermarium’s staff page lists only five professors, all from Poland.¹⁰⁹

Ekler, who focused on family policy in his speech, noted that “today in Hungary, there’s a broad consensus [on]... promoting the traditional family... The [combination] of a successful economic policy and targeted measures of family policy is the core of the way we are making what we used to call... the Hungarian model... ‘families first,’ and that’s our message from Hungary to you.”¹¹⁰ In rhetorically linking economic prosperity and the “traditional” family model, Ekler implied that if nontraditional family models are allowed to prevail, economic hardship will soon follow.¹¹¹ This was a central tenet of the panel’s argument—the economic prosperity that panelists claimed for Central Europe was framed as a result of conservative governance and the purported prevalence of “traditional values” in the region. Tyrmand stated this outright, arguing that “the quality of [investment] assets is higher here because of the people, *because of the culture*, because of the education.”¹¹² This line of argumentation was, albeit indirectly, reactive—in the same way that assertions of Central Europe’s arch-European identity emerged in response to insecurities around European belonging, claims of economic superiority make the most rhetorical sense when understood in the context of potential insecurities around the region’s comparatively late transition to a market economy when compared to Western Europe.

Yurash, whose speech largely revolved around praising Poland as an example for Ukrainian conservatives to emulate, asserted that the conference “represents something very deep and profound about the reality of the Central European spirit... a very important symbol of the role that Poland has clearly captured in its achievements, since independence from Communism in 1991. Poland has clearly shown the way in terms of how to reform yourself, how to achieve success, and how to join European... institutions of respect and dignity.”¹¹³ Similarly, Hammer stated that the notion of Central Europe espoused at the conference “really can and ought to serve as inspiration... as a lot of my fellow American conservative colleagues try to basically philosophically and intellectually find themselves, find... who we actually are.”¹¹⁴

The panel’s narrative is perhaps more coherent within the overarching context of the conference when considered together with the previous discussions of academic freedom and classical values. Panelists’ assertions of regional economic prosperity complemented earlier framings of the liberal European Union as domineering and suggested that a deeply conservative, economically competent Central Europe could not only ward off incursions from the East but challenge Brussels’ liberal hegemony from the West. In this context, panelists treated economic success and population retention as quantifiable indicators of metapolitical success. As conservative ideologues push the Overton window rightwards, Collegium Intermarium aims to train political and legal elites who will galvanize a conservative transformation in the European Union. For this to take place, however, conservative groups must have access to youth that they can train to continue, and win, the battle for Europe, as well as a clear understanding of the social structure they seek to legally enforce. In the conference’s fourth and final panel, speakers prescribed a set of legal and social efforts that they seek to implement, which they claimed will prevent the destruction of the Western world.

106 Szucs, Intermarium Conference, 6:59:51.

107 Szucs, Intermarium Conference, 7:00:36.

108 Zoe Strimpel, “Inside Viktor Orbán’s ideas factory,” *The New Statesman*. August 10, 2023. <https://www.newstatesman.com/world/europe/2023/08/inside-viktor-orban-ideas-factory>

109 “Kadra,” Collegium Intermarium. <https://collegiumintermarium.org/kadra>

110 Ekler, Intermarium Conference, 6:42:30.

111 For a well-researched examination of Hungary’s instrumentalization of the “traditional” family model and its socioeconomic impact, see Eva Fodor, “The Gender Regime of Anti-Liberal Hungary,” (Bern: Springer Nature, 2022).

112 Tyrmand, Intermarium Conference, 7:12:15; emphasis my own.

113 Yurash, Intermarium Conference, 7:04:24.

114 Hammer, Intermarium Conference, 6:33:40.

Panel 4: Western Legal Heritage in the Modern World

The fourth panel, which centered around Western legal heritage in the modern world, continued the conference’s anti-modernist narrative and criticism of liberal influences on the human rights paradigm. While panelists did not stray from GCR rhetorical patterns demonstrated in previous panels, the final panel, which framed Western legal heritage as specifically affiliated with pro-life activism, had a clear focus on attestations that aspects of “gender ideology,” primarily LGBTQ+ identity and abortion, will lead to the destruction of the Western world. By framing “gender ideology” as a corrupting influence on Western society that must be rooted out through the adoption of conservative morality structures, the panelists presented homophobic and transphobic discrimination as moral imperatives. The speakers employed Christian eschatological rhetoric, implying or openly stating that continued tolerance for “gender ideology” will bring about the apocalypse, in which evil will triumph over good, and the world will end.

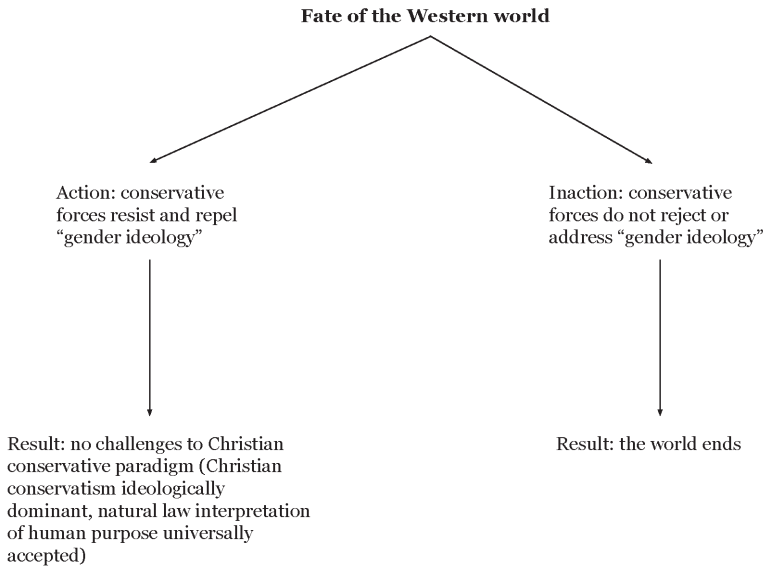


Figure 4: projected outcomes at the Intermarium Conference.

This final panel combined the “natural order,” “true Europe,” and “gender ideology” narratives to great emotional effect. Panelists presented two possible futures, the outcome of which they presented as dependent on conservative activism: either conservatives act to cleanse Western society and law of “gender ideology,” resulting in the manifestation of a “true European” society characterized by prevailing conservative influence, universal acceptance of the Christian conservative natural law paradigm, and the absence of liberalizing impulses or challenges to conservative hegemony, or the world will end.

The six panelists, five of whom were lawyers, presented the adoption of inclusive language into human rights discourses as a gambit by “gender ideologists” to ideologically poison a peaceful, tolerant Western society, such that the West has destroyed itself in a misguided attempt at tolerance. The speakers attacked “gender ideologists” both morally and intellectually, accusing them of selfishness, illogicality, hypocrisy, and violence to discredit them. They frequently employed emotionally charged language to construct an in-group/out-group dichotomy where members of the in-group (the conference participants and those who ideologically align with the narrative of the Intermaium Conference) were referred to as “the sons of light” and the “rightful heirs” of Western civilization, while the out-group, the “gender ideologists,” were termed “the sons of darkness” and dehumanized.

The panel's host, Paweł Lisicki, is the co-founder and editor-in-chief of the PiS-aligned conservative Christian Polish news outlet *Do Rzeczy*. Lisicki has an extensive body of publications, about which fellow Catholic journalist Monika Białkowska has commented that “with each publication, Lisicki sounds more and more as if he did not believe in the power of the Gospel to transform the world... He is afraid and feels that he has to defend it.”¹¹⁵

Francisco Javier Borrego Borrego is a Spanish lawyer with a long history of involvement in international human rights law, primarily at the European Court of Human Rights. A staunch pro-life activist, Borrego has a set script to rail against modernity and its agents—entire segments of his conference speech, which are replicated elsewhere in his publications and interviews, aligned neatly with typical patterns of GCR rhetoric aimed at delegitimizing liberal morality.¹¹⁶

Lawyer Jan Majchrowski served as a judge for Poland's Supreme Court from 2018 until 2021. In 2023, Majchrowski published his first book, *Against Armed Illiterates*, in which he likened contemporary editorial standards to Communist censorship:

The Council of the Polish Language has recently disavowed, not very gently, the Polish term “*Murzyn*,” which has been neutral in our country for centuries, recommending [terms such as] Black Afro-Americans [and other such] linguistic oddities native to countries where Negroes were slaves. Other linguistic recommendations and exhortations, which will soon turn into the subsoil of a new censorship that tracks thought and word crimes, are better not mentioned... Language is the spearhead of ideas! Enough to look at what the “totalitarian liberals,” neo-communists, and their ideological brethren, who have always treated terminology as an instrument of politics, no less important than a firing squad, are doing with it today. To these people, language was primarily used to lie... Nothing has changed.¹¹⁷

In early 2024, Majchrowski collaborated with *Ordo Iuris* in creating an archive to collect “documented information regarding violations of the law... [in reaction] to a number of unlawful actions taken by specific public authorities after December 13, 2023,” suggesting that newly elected officials in Donald Tusk's center-right led, pro-EU government immediately began abusing their constitutional powers after their swearing-in.¹¹⁸

Judge Maria Gintowt-Jankowicz is a former justice of Poland's Constitutional Tribunal. With a specialization in financial law, Gintowt-Jankowicz helped found the National School of Public Administration (KSAP) in 1990. Per KSAP's website, the organization aims to train civil servants who are “impartial, politically neutral... [and] accountable for the tasks conferred upon them.”¹¹⁹ During the panel, Gintowt-Jankowicz expressed that “this topic is not entirely clear to me... Perhaps I should not speak here on a topic that is neither my specialty academically nor professionally.”¹²⁰ Her speech did not contribute to the panel's argument for intolerance in defense of the West—in fact, she challenged the panel's concept slightly, arguing that most contemporary vestiges of Roman law exist in private law, entirely separate from human rights law.

Sebastian Kaleta is a lawyer and public official who was affiliated with PiS from 2015 until 2019 when he joined the national conservative Eurosceptic party *Solidarna Polska* (Solidarity Poland). Kaleta, who has repeatedly accused EU officials of interfering in Polish governance and elections, served as Secretary of State for the Ministry of Justice from 2019 until 2023. In 2022, when Poland was faced with EU backlash over rule-of-law violations, Kaleta announced on Twitter that “Poland has to defend its democracy against blackmail that aims to take away our right to decide about ourselves.”¹²¹ In August 2023, Kaleta accused the European Commission of intent to interfere in the upcoming October elections

115 Monika Białkowska, “Lisicki sięgnął bruku,” *Przewodnik Katolicki* 44 (2018). <https://www.przewodnik-katolicki.pl/Archiwum/2018/Przewodnik-Katolicki-44-2018/Wiara-i-Kosciol/Lisicki-siegnal-bruku>

116 Borrego's author page at the ECLJ provides several salient examples: <https://eclj.org/writers/javier-borrego/>.

117 Jan Majchrowski, “Przeciw uzbrojonym analfabetom,” *Wszystko co Najważniejsze*. <https://wszystkocoonajwazniejsze.pl/jan-majchrowski-przeciw-uzbrojonym-analfabetom/>; for discussion of the term *murzyn* and its use in Poland, see Bolaji Balogun and Konrad Pędziwiatr, “Stop calling me *Murzyn* — how Black Lives Matter in Poland,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 49(6), 2023: 1552-1569. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2022.2154914>

118 “Komunikat,” *Ordo Iuris*, January 24, 2024. <https://ordoiuris.pl/dzialalnosc-instytutu/komunikat>

119 “Misja i działalność,” *KSAP*. Accessed April 4, 2024. <https://ksap.gov.pl/ksap/en/mission>

120 Gintowt-Jankowicz, *Intermarium Conference*, 9:01:25.

121 “Poland, Hungary lose legal challenge against EU rule-of-law tool,” *Al Jazeera*, February 16, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/16/poland-hungary-lose-legal-challenge-against-eu-rule-of-law-tool>

by “undermining the legality of our country’s functioning and preparing the ground for torpedoing the election campaign.”¹²²

The panel’s final participant, Ligia de Jesus Castaldi, is a vehemently pro-life American lawyer whose legal career has focused heavily on combating abortion rights within human rights law. Castaldi wrote for *Public Discourse* in 2020 that “abortion has never become a legal right, in any nation, through a truly democratic process.”¹²³ Castaldi’s panel participation was limited to a pre-recorded lecture on the modern Latin American world and its widespread legal opposition to abortion, in which she called for “Christian nations [to] reject... false understanding of female empowerment and promote true non-violent alternatives and compassionate support for... unplanned pregnancies.”¹²⁴

The panelists framed Western legal heritage as inherently at odds with LGBTQ+ identity and abortion, suggesting that contemporary Western governments must oppose both in the spirit of embracing their Western heritage, lest they endanger the world by failing to fulfill their responsibility to protect their citizens. “Linguistic manipulation” within human rights discourse was framed as a significant threat that, according to the panelists, illustrates a sweeping violation of natural law in the modern West.¹²⁵ The overarching panel narrative presented an initially balanced liberal tradition, now coopted by pernicious “gender ideologists” seeking to use democratic structures against European societies to force them to submit to “gender ideology.” Panelists claimed that the adoption of gender-inclusive legal language would lead to the fall of Western civilization, and, in claiming that Collegium Intermarium would oppose “gender ideologists,” perpetuated earlier panelists’ claims that the school would free the West from ideological domination.

Power to the People?

In his opening speech, Lisicki established the rhetorical foundation for the rest of the panel by asserting that the legal heritage of Western civilization is dead or near extinction. “In the last few decades,” he claimed, “this heritage has been greatly changed, for example... free abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriages... So, we can ask the question: Can we still speak of any legal heritage of Western civilization today?”¹²⁶ While Lisicki explicitly contrasted Western legal heritage with abortion and same-sex marriage, other speakers expressed this dichotomy less clearly, speaking of truth versus falsehood or morality versus selfishness. In each of these cases, speakers presented Western legal heritage as monolithic and naturally morally pure but now corrupted through the introduction of social elements violating natural law in modern Western society.

Citing Polish historian Feliks Koneczny, Majchrowski identified “power, which could be otherwise put as strength, *imperio*, the strength of the state, the strength of the society, an organized society, and morality” as the two forces that together constitute society, such that “the very essence of the Latin civilization was the eternal connection of law and morality.”¹²⁷ He suggested that “we, the Europeans, anchored” this heritage of the connection between law and morality, but that contemporary law has been severed from morality, resulting in a modern European civilization that is not the intellectual heir to Latin civilization.¹²⁸ It is entirely reasonable to interpret Majchrowski’s use of the term “morality” and its relation to law as synonymous with “Christian ethics,” as he asserted that any valid sociocultural assemblage must center on religious belief because “[either] society is orientated metaphysically, or there is no civilization... This is the way to put this question of law and morality because if we don’t do it in the name of any good, we only do it in the name of power and our own selfish interests.”¹²⁹ Here, Majchrowski reproduced the previously mentioned Catholic integralist discussion around proper government. Much like with “classical values” and “morality,” the concept of “metaphysical orientation” within the conference’s narrative denoted conservative Catholic faith, and “civilization” only referred to those societies featuring social structures in alignment with the “true Europe” narrative.

122 “Sebastian Kaleta: widzimy jasno, że Komisja Europejska zamierza ingerować w kampanię wyborczą w Polsce,” *Polska Agencja Prasowa*, August 21, 2023. <https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/sebastian-kaleta-widzimy-jasno-ze-komisja-europejska-zamierza-ingerowac-w-kampanie>

123 Lidia de Jesus Castaldi, “Democratic Lawmaking and the Creation of International Abortion Rights,” *Public Discourse*, July 10, 2020. <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/07/65499/>

124 Castaldi, Intermarium Conference, 9:57:23.

125 Lisicki, Borrego, and Majchrowski all use the term “manipulation” in reference to linguistic changes like the introduction of the term “gender” to replace “sex” where relevant.

126 Lisicki, Intermarium Conference, 8:39:28.

127 Majchrowski, Intermarium Conference, 9:19:10.

128 Majchrowski, Intermarium Conference, 9:19:58.

129 Majchrowski, Intermarium Conference, 9:22:21.

Borrego drew on ancient Roman statecraft to discuss Western legal heritage in the modern world, quoting Cicero's political formula "*potestas in populo, auctoritas in senatu*" (power resides in the people, authority rests with the Senate) to delineate between earthly power, which rests with the populace, and authority gained through knowledge, which lies with the governing body. Borrego argued that modern Western societies do not truly align with this formula because modern elected officials are associated with *potestas* (power) rather than *auctoritas* (authority). Because *potestas* is overrepresented in contemporary government, "those who are elected by the people are very limited, are very dependent, on the so-called public opinion, and the so-called public opinion nowadays has a certain intrinsic error, a misunderstanding."¹³⁰ Borrego attributed this misunderstanding to a vocal minority that allegedly dominates contemporary discourse, such that "the great majority of the citizens become silent, and... because of cowardice or comfort, support this minority opinion."¹³¹

In the face of this "falsified public opinion," Borrego identified the contemporary holders of *auctoritas* as "the people, the persons or groups, that because of their experience, because of their work, knowledge, are respected in the society, and their opinions influence the society."¹³² Borrego claimed that the community he addresses holds true *auctoritas*, which goes unappreciated in the modern world—"what we do today, our great doctrinal works, thick books, deep, full of knowledge, that we and only we read, we do not penetrate the society, in my modest opinion, the way we should."¹³³ Here, Borrego engaged the "natural order" narrative, framing his personal belief that conservative arguments should be more widely accepted as proof that contemporary Western society has diverged from the natural order and suggesting that, in a world compliant with the natural order, conservative academics would hold significantly more cultural influence than they currently do. This assertion implies that fault may lie with those populations who select today's elected leaders—given the overall conference atmosphere and other panelists' predilections for authoritarian politics and calls for a European return to empire, together with TFP founder Corrêa de Oliveira's explicit calls for the reinstallation of aristocracy, it seems reasonable to interpret Borrego's critiques of modern electoral processes as directed against increasingly gender and class-diverse voting populations.

Panelists repeatedly blamed politicians for contributing to the fall of Western society through the abuse of democratic processes. Majchrowski asserted that "throughout the centuries in Europe, politicians, by breaking the law, governing unjustly [sic], doing evil, have ever been trying to convince us... that bad law is, in fact, good law, that it is not immoral, that it is absolutely observant of morality." He then went on to invoke populist anti-elite sentiments, accusing politicians of lying and exploiting the citizens they are meant to protect.¹³⁴ Kaleta later stated further that because gender-inclusive language has entered EU documentation, "the tools that were created by our civilization [to realize] our freedom... are being used to create a state that actually limits the freedom of its citizens."¹³⁵ This rhetoric clearly overlaps with previously discussed patterns of Central European conservative Euroscepticism, mobilized here in the context of the "natural order" and "true Europe" narratives. The speakers implied that Western society is failing because politicians have neglected their duties of upholding sufficient standards of morality and that these politicians have thus brought about a "false Europe" rather than the "true Europe," which would exist if the political cadre was sufficiently morally sound. The unstated implication here was that the conference attendees were the type of people who were sufficiently morally sound to guide Western society because they understood and were able to explain how and where Western society had gone wrong.

Majchrowski framed the rejection of "gender ideology" in a particularly apocalyptic light, accusing Western society of abandoning its foundations with disastrous results:

Today's world has murdered the Western civilization... The rightful heirs have forgotten about it. They forgot that it belongs to them, that it's their responsibility to cultivate it, to pick the weeds, to [clear] the ground, to sow the good seed, to take good care of it, and in the end, to reap the deserved fruit... We are living in two different worlds that cannot coexist in the same place and the same time because they would have to clash inevitably. They cannot coexist... We are approaching the times when... people will no longer try to present evil as good but to present evil as

¹³⁰ Borrego, Intermarium Conference, 8:42:27.

¹³¹ Borrego, Intermarium Conference, 8:43:01.

¹³² Borrego, Intermarium Conference, 8:43:50.

¹³³ Borrego, Intermarium Conference, 8:46:24.

¹³⁴ Majchrowski, Intermarium Conference, 9:21:01.

¹³⁵ Kaleta, Intermarium Conference, 9:40:08.

evil and put it on the altar, and we are approaching this time, and this is going to be the real end of civilization.¹³⁶

Majchrowski's claim that "today's world" cannot coexist with "Western civilization" is telling—it provided an explicit, compelling justification for the wholesale eradication of those social elements aligned with "today's world" on the grounds that only through their complete removal can the path be laid for a return to the "Western civilization" that Collegium Intermarium is meant to restore. Moreover, it blames past generations of politicians for failing to effectively suppress these undesirable social elements, resulting in the "end of civilization" now being imminent. This, in turn, potentially justifies extreme actions in the name of "Western civilization," such as the removal of LGBTQ+ identity from public life in Western society, by framing the modern world as teetering on the edge of irreversible disaster.

Nonsense and Arsenic

The panelists used a variety of rhetorical strategies to attack and demonize LGBTQ+ identity—for example, Lisicki sought to invalidate Polish "gender ideologists" by proving them illogical. He stated that Polish discourse over LGBTQ+ identity:

Has been greatly based on certain contradictory logic because when we speak of it, we want to attach it to a certain arbitrary decision, whether you are a man or a woman, or who is a man or a woman; then, I mean, logically, we reach an aporia, contradiction. That's why demanding equal rights for men and women, and at the same time the right to choose whether you're a man or a woman—I mean, this is contradictory; it makes no sense.¹³⁷

Here, Lisicki demonstrated the rhetorical usefulness of conceiving "gender ideology" as an amalgam of feminism and queer activism. By conflating the two groups and presenting their separate but related aims as one contradictory goal, he invalidated both simultaneously. He further invalidated transgender identity by oversimplifying the process of gender transition, which he frames as a shortcut to gaining rights rather than a commonly inaccessible, arduous, physically and mentally taxing process often accompanied by immense discrimination.

Borrego made recourse to a particularly emotionally charged rhetorical tactic for religious Europeans by likening the enemy to a demonic force and the Nazi regime. "Do you remember the words by Victor Klemperer, who's speaking about the Nazis? The sons of darkness are very clever; they are doing it very well. They are using words like an arsenic, drop after drop" to normalize purportedly harmful ideologies so that "in the end, we're speaking of genders [and] voluntary interruption of pregnancy, [rather than queer identity and] abortion."¹³⁸ Borrego accused the "sons of darkness" of exploiting democratic processes through the use of coded language to secretly achieve goals that the social majority is opposed to. Presenting "gender ideologists" as scheming opportunists who will exploit trust and permissiveness functions to justify intolerance, Borrego marked any linguistic or social change initiated by "gender ideologists" as "deadly arsenic" and implied that any single instance of permissiveness would create a pattern of exploitation by "gender ideologists," inevitably resulting in the death of Western society. By presenting this hypothetical sequence of events as future reality, Borrego constructed a compelling call to action for those who see themselves as the protectors of Western civilization: act now against "gender ideology" or see Western civilization destroyed.

Borrego further demonized "gender ideologists" through a story he recounted, in which he cast himself as a role model against "gender ideology." He claimed:

In one of the meetings in Rome, I was surprised by the expression "gender." I asked, "Excuse me, have we accepted that gender has replaced sex?" But people say, "No, it's a lost battle; we have to use it." I said, "No, sex is a biological difference. Gender is a cultural expression that anybody can have the way they like. Don't mistake these

¹³⁶ Majchrowski, Intermarium Conference, 9:13:34-9:17:11.

¹³⁷ Lisicki, Intermarium Conference, 9:41:46.

¹³⁸ Borrego, Intermarium Conference, 8:49:56.

two.” But Javier, you know, no, I mean, it’s a lost battle. I said, “No, there are no battles to lose. You fight until the last minute.”¹³⁹

Borrego’s rhetorical maneuver here was to simultaneously present himself as a tolerant and truthful freedom fighter and his opponents as a malicious and misguided tyrannical gender regime. He claimed, without citation, that people feel they are forced to make further and further accommodations to “gender ideology,” while gender expression is already something that “anybody can have the way they like.” This argument suggests that previous liberalizing developments in contemporary understandings of gender and sexuality are false victories by “gender ideologists,” who continue to force their views on a populace that would prefer not to accept these changes. In recounting the story at the conference, Borrego transformed his advice to his interlocutors at the Vatican into an urgent call to action, empowering conservative individuals to combat “gender ideology” in order to save the world.

Selfishness was a recurring theme, with panelists implying a connection between LGBTQ+ identity and selfishness, rooted in the “natural order” narrative, which holds that regardless of one’s attractions, it is one’s purpose and responsibility to conform to the gender binary and pursue relationships with a fertile member of the opposite sex for the sake of reproduction. Within the “natural order” narrative, straying from one’s purpose is not only harmful to the self but to all of society. In this context, Borrego’s warning of impending cultural domination became more dire: not only must terms like “gender” be disallowed to enter law, but LGBTQ+ individuals cannot be permitted to openly express their identity because they will endanger all of society. Each of these unstated intricacies was included when panelists suggested that denial of desire is a necessity for a healthy society. Kaleta expressed this clearly: “This view that we see today, that not every thought is desired that can enter into life, will bring us to the very good legal methods to build a new society... the professor [Majchrowski] has mentioned the difference, the biological one, the gender one, which is a creation from the last few decades.”¹⁴⁰ “Very good legal methods,” then, reject undesired thoughts, including an extra-binary conception of gender, as should societies built upon these methods.

Within this framework, Collegium Intermarium was presented as a savior, using “very good legal methods” to usher in ideological freedom. Majchrowski declared that “people want to live in the world of order, justice, good, and beauty... a world that this civilization proposes.”¹⁴¹ He reinforced the in-group/out-group dichotomy, presenting people who want to reject “gender ideology” as inherently good and a world without “gender ideology” as just and beautiful. As a law school, Majchrowski said, Collegium Intermarium will be different from existing educational institutions because it will revive true Western legal heritage, which “doesn’t just give [people] a sense of [false] safety, but real safety.”¹⁴² Neither Majchrowski nor any other panelist speculated on the specifics of the new world—the audience was told only that the bad outcome is the greatest danger imaginable, and the good outcome is safe.

As Triandafyllidou and Gropas have shown of different Europes across time, this new, “true Europe” that the conference offered its participants is defined by negation—it exists in relation to the parties and ideologies that will be entirely absent from the new society.¹⁴³ This practice of drawing emotionally charged binaries, characterized by extreme hypotheticals presented as fact, was the conference’s ultimate rhetorical conceit. Over the course of the conference, the panelists developed a set of truth claims that could be used to justify social and legal attacks on LGBTQ+ identity and influence, with the ultimate goal of its eradication.

Conclusion

Collegium Intermarium’s significance for the Global Christian Right goes beyond education, legitimation, or fraternization. The institution represents the GCR’s drive to transform Europe into a conservative, Christian, hierarchical society in which challenges to conservative hegemony are nonexistent. Speakers at the Intermarium Conference linked ideological homogeneity to truth and the existence of a natural order, while *Ordo Juris*’ political record indicates habitual enforcement of conformity through repression. Collegium Intermarium has thus far benefited from collaborations with GCR powerhouses like the World Congress of Families and CitizenGO, and regardless of whether it

139 Borrego, Intermarium Conference, 8:47:35.

140 Kaleta, Intermarium Conference, 9:36:34.

141 Majchrowski, Intermarium Conference, 9:28:40.

142 Majchrowski, Intermarium Conference, 9:29:21.

143 Anna Triandafyllidou and Ruby Gropas, *What is Europe?* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2023).

ultimately flourishes or falters as an institution, its lineage and the circumstances of its creation speak to significant investments in well-funded GCR educational institutions with international influence.

There is a great deal of research left to be done on the GCR, Central European illiberalism, and Collegium Intermarium. The Intermarium Conference was live-streamed on YouTube, where it remains accessible as a ten-hour video with simultaneous translation in English and Polish. This video is a lasting artifact with the capacity to emotionally influence viewers—as long as the video remains on YouTube, the algorithm will continue to promote it and similarly polarizing content to viewers. Yet scrubbing it from the internet or restricting its publication would give some small credence to narratives of conservative victimhood, and downplaying the conference as a “fringe” or “extremist” event trivializes very real, globally influential movements.

It is unclear what the future will bring for Collegium Intermarium—since the Intermarium Conference, the institution has faced a series of challenges. In early 2022, *Ordo Iuris* unexpectedly made headlines when its vice president, Tymoteusz Zych, had an affair with another married employee. Both parties subsequently divorced their spouses in flagrant violation of *Ordo Iuris*’ typical code of conduct and separated from the organization. Zych quickly joined Polish conservative think tank *Logos Europa* and soon denounced *Ordo Iuris* and its new sole leader, Zych’s longtime collaborator Jerzy Kwaśniewski:

You only need to look at the composition of the institute’s authorities to know who it serves. It was once argued that religious radicals were behind *Ordo Iuris*, but the paradox is that Kwaśniewski’s statement, compared to the statements of TFP members, seems to be much more radical. Such actions serve people who want our community to be as broken as possible... When emotions are constantly heated to redness, it is known that such action will serve people who are not in favor of the community. Extreme polarization in the current geopolitical situation weakens Poland.¹⁴⁴

The fractured family of organizations has similarly struggled to recruit a new generation of members—despite receiving millions of złoty in government funding, Collegium Intermarium only accepted a single student for study in 2024.¹⁴⁵

Even as Collegium Intermarium is on a downward swing, and even following PiS’ October 2023 electoral defeat, GCR activism is far from being endangered in Central Europe and abroad. In a religiously diverse Central Europe, GCR actors have elected to collaborate under a “big-tent” of conservative Christianity, in which denominational differences are set aside, and conservative Christian rhetoric is kept vague and directed against common enemies. National leaders have made efforts to signal their goodwill across religious fault lines—Viktor Orbán, for instance, who claims to be a reformed agnostic turned staunch Calvinist, tweeted in April 2023 after Pope Francis visited Hungary for the second time in two years that “Hungary has a future if it stays on the Christian path.”¹⁴⁶

It is this precise willingness to embrace commonalities and unite against common enemies that strengthens the GCR and ensures its continued influence, a strategy that similarly connects Central Europe to the broader GCR. In particular, the influential, well-funded American Christian right and Central European Christian conservatives have drawn notably closer in recent years. Polish and Hungarian officials have spoken at iterations of the increasingly global American Conservative Political Action Conference since 2022; CPAC Hungary 2024 was co-organized by the Hungarian Center for Fundamental Rights, an *Ordo Iuris* collaborator.¹⁴⁷ The European Union’s elections in the summer of 2024 saw significant gains in political representation for influential national populist movements, though it remains unclear how successfully these national movements will cooperate on the international stage.¹⁴⁸ With an overall voting rate of 50.74% in the European elections and an increasingly fractured

144 Jacek Nizinkiewicz, “Tymoteusz Zych, były wiceprezes Ordo Iuris: Ordo Iuris osłabia Polskę,” *Rzeczpospolita*, May 16, 2022. <https://www.rp.pl/kraj/art36306751-tymoteusz-zych-byly-wiceprezes-ordo-iuris-ordo-iuris-oslabia-polske>

145 “Only one student signs up at conservative Polish university established to educate new ‘elite,’” *Notes from Poland*, November 2, 2023. <https://notesfrompoland.com/2023/11/02/only-one-student-signs-up-at-conservative-polish-university-established-to-educate-new-elite/>

146 Lili Bayer, “Be open to foreigners, Pope Francis tells Hungarians,” *Politico*, April 30, 2023. <https://www.politico.eu/article/be-open-foreigners-pope-francis-tell-hungary-viktor-orban/>; Alex Faludy, “Don’t Believe Viktor Orbán’s Defender-of-Christianity Pose,” *The Bulwark*, November 20, 2023. <https://www.thebulwark.com/p/viktor-orban-defender-christianity-poseur>.

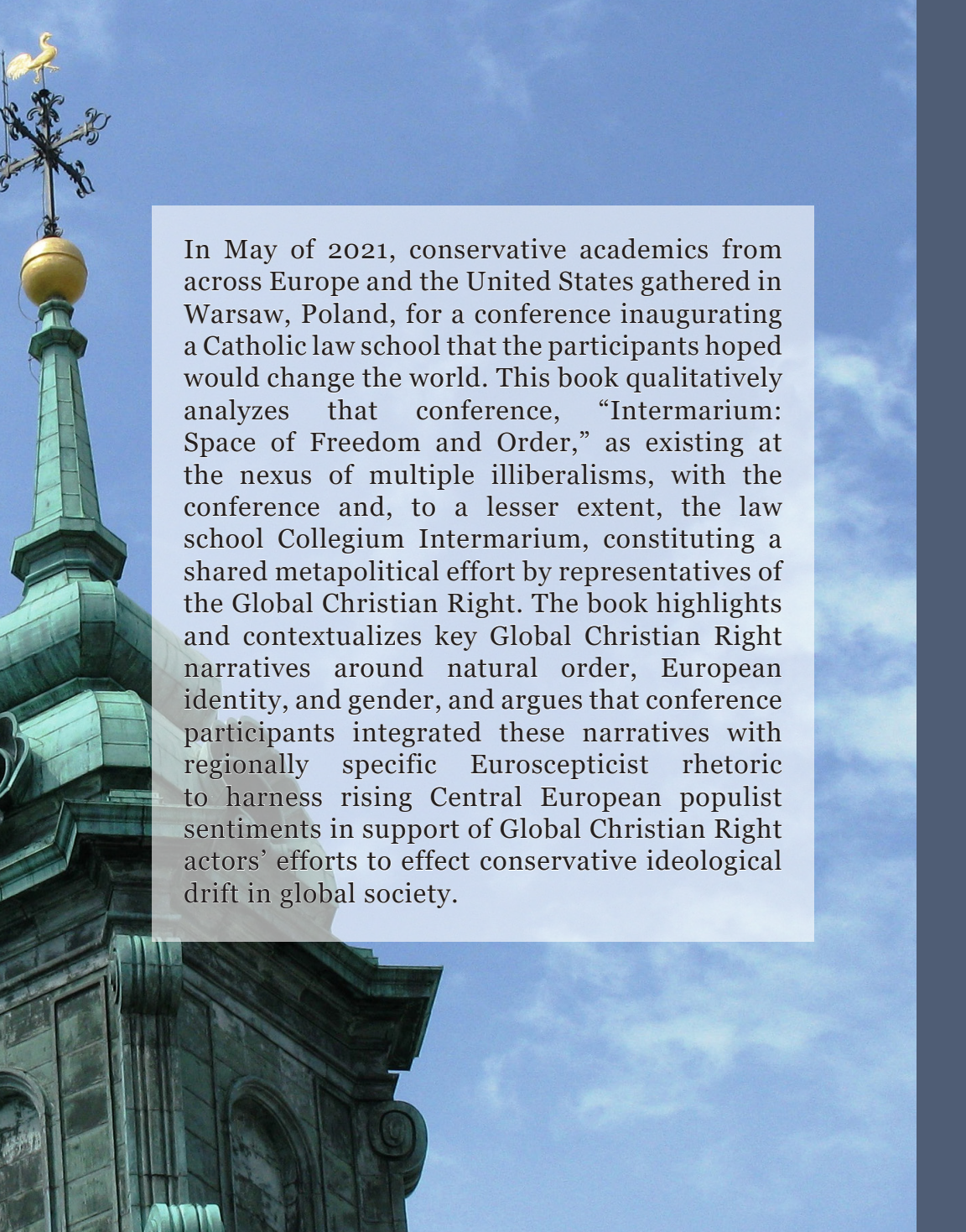
147 “Home,” CPAC Hungary. <https://www.cpachungary.com/en/>.

148 Johan Hassel and Robert Benson, “EU Elections: What the results mean and why they matter,” Center for American Progress, June 13, 2024. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/eu-elections-what-the-results-mean-and-why-they-matter/>

American public leading up to Donald Trump's reelection in November 2024, disillusionment and lack of civic engagement may prove just as salient a threat to democracy as active attacks on democratic structures.¹⁴⁹

At the Intermarium Conference, speakers claimed that the European future they envision is globally desired and that the entire European population wishes to embrace conservative Christianity and return to traditional values. European civil society activists are doing their part to disprove these narratives by organizing protests and showing their support for reproductive justice and LGBTQ+ rights—demonstrating that a different Central Europe exists than the one projected by the GCR. Scholars and policymakers who prefer a more progressive future have opportunities here, too, both to support liberalizing human rights legislation and to examine conservative narratives, as I have done here. At the Intermarium Conference alone, religious studies scholars may wish to address dogmatic claims, and political scientists can study how speakers signal their own national political conflicts in speeches. An anthropological case study of Ordo Iuris as an organization could reveal fascinating insights around motivations and relations in such a charged space. The nested chain of businesses that led to Collegium Intermarium's creation could provide key information about business practices in GCR moneymaking machines. Legal theorists can explore how GCR actors in other countries might, and do, reproduce Ordo Iuris' achievements abroad and how liberal policymakers might shore up legislation against that possibility. GCR actors will continue working, and more opportunities for research will arise. There is space for everyone in this movement—reading, thinking, and talking about the world is just as important as writing about it. GCR actors are not going to stop trying to create the world of “freedom and order” they believe should exist. If the worldview I have illustrated throughout this book does not appeal to you, then consider how you can help realize the world you wish to live in.

149 “2024 European election results,” European Parliament, updated September 6, 2024. <https://www.results.elections.europa.eu/en/>.



In May of 2021, conservative academics from across Europe and the United States gathered in Warsaw, Poland, for a conference inaugurating a Catholic law school that the participants hoped would change the world. This book qualitatively analyzes that conference, “Intermarium: Space of Freedom and Order,” as existing at the nexus of multiple illiberalisms, with the conference and, to a lesser extent, the law school Collegium Intermarium, constituting a shared metapolitical effort by representatives of the Global Christian Right. The book highlights and contextualizes key Global Christian Right narratives around natural order, European identity, and gender, and argues that conference participants integrated these narratives with regionally specific Euroscepticist rhetoric to harness rising Central European populist sentiments in support of Global Christian Right actors’ efforts to effect conservative ideological drift in global society.



Natural Law and Imagined Theocracies at Poland's Collegium Intermarium

By Eliza Fisher