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## **The Role of the Catholic Church in Environmental Politics in Europe**

In its particularly innovative third part, Agenda 21 emphasizes the profound impact of influential civil groups in creating sustainable development. In Europe one of these influential groups are the major Christian churches. Yet how much influence does the Church actually have on the environment? The aim of my intended study, entitled "The Role of the Catholic Church in Environmental Politics in Europe", is to deal with this question in a systematic manner.

There are already several studies which examine the relationship between the Church and the environment and the relationship between modern states and the Church. Yet scientific research focusing on the interconnection of these three aspects, as Agenda 21 suggests, has yet to be conducted. My dissertation project aims to fill this gap.

My study will examine the role of the Catholic Church in environmental politics (politics in the Aristotelian sense) over the past ten years. Using a series of case studies, my work will describe the special relationship between the Church, the state, and society in various countries. My research will primarily concentrate on environmental debates surrounding the Church's responsibility for the environment. Only through this contextual approach can the degree of the Church's environmental responsibility be properly ascertained.

For this reason, my study is limited in several aspects. First of all, my focus is on Europe, where the Christian tradition plays a particularly important role. Furthermore, I have selected several European countries and regions in order to highlight the fact that a variety of distinct relationships between different states and the Church exist. Finally, my study will concentrate primarily on the Catholic Church.

Where the situation of the Catholic Church in Germany is dominated by a resolute scientific theology, the Ukraine, which unlike Germany is a country in the midst of political and economic transformation, has ample space for exploring new possibilities in the realm of Church-state relations. The French Church has a secular relationship to the State due to its adherence to the *laïcité* system, and is therefore open to alternative and unconventional practices. The situation in Scandinavia is similar to that of France, where, thanks to the diasporic nature of the Catholic community, creative approaches are much more likely to be applied. The Catholic Church in Poland is fundamentally different from the other case studies because of its largely conservative and nationally-oriented position.

These case studies will allow me to compare and contrast the "typical" behavior of the Church in different countries. I aim to explore under which conditions elements of local Church policies can potentially be transferred to other countries who might be able to benefit from them. Furthermore, I will explore whether it is even possible to typify of countries with regard to ecclesiastical influence on environmental policy.