

message to the Primate on his 75th birthday¹⁰ (3 August), simultaneously a closed meeting of high Party functionaries was told by the Minister for Religious Affairs, Mr. Kakol, that the struggle against religion must be energetically pursued. The government, said the Minister, was contemplating, for example, new steps to prevent children taking part in religious activities.¹¹

Whatever the Party and government plan to do in their hitherto unrewarding struggle with the Church, the year 1976 seems likely to be a turning point for organized religion in Poland. From being the moral authority of the nation the Episcopate has, by the force of circumstances and by its own volition, become the spokesman for society.

¹ *Financial Times*, 13 January 1976.

² *The Times*, 6 May 1976.

³ See "Catholic Intellectuals and Constitutional Change in Poland" by Roman Slowacki in RCL Vol. 4, No. 3, pp. 12-15.

⁴ *Guardian*, 20 November 1976.

⁵ *Reuters*, 28 November 1976. *International Herald Tribune*, 29 November 1976.

⁶ In 1976 the government issued only 20 building permits for new churches and chapels.

⁷ *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 30 November 1976.

⁸ *The Times* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 8 December 1976.

⁹ *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 14 December 1976.

¹⁰ *Guardian*, 1 October 1976.

¹¹ *Documentation Catholique*, Paris, August 1976.

Poles Demand Basic Freedoms

The decision to introduce amendments to Poland's Constitution evoked protests from religious leaders, writers, university professors, students, artists and scientists. The first of such protests (printed below) was signed by 59 people, mainly intellectuals, and sent to the Speaker of the Polish Parliament on 5 December 1975.

The directives for the 7th Party Congress of the PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party) include the announcement of a change in the Constitution. Following the conference in Helsinki, during which the Polish government, together with the governments of 34 other nations, formally asserted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we consider that the introduction of these basic freedoms should constitute a new milestone in the history of our country and in the lives of individuals. Prompted by our civic concern, we feel that the Constitution and the legislation based on it

should above all guarantee the following civil rights:

Freedom of conscience and religious practice. These freedoms do not exist when people professing religious beliefs or expressing an ideology other than that which is officially made compulsory are barred from a considerable number of key posts in public offices and institutions, in social organizations and in the national economy. Therefore all citizens, irrespective of their religion, ideology or party-political affiliation, must be assured of an equal right to take up government posts. The deciding factors for such appointments should only be one's qualifications, ability, and personal integrity. The free practice of religion and the building of places of worship must also be made possible for all denominational groups.

Freedom of work. There is no such freedom while the State is the sole employer, and while trade unions are forced to conform to the administration

of the Party, which actually wields the power in the State. In conditions such as these – as the events of 1956 and 1970 testify – any attempts to protect the workers' interests are threatened by bloodshed and can lead to serious outbreaks of violence. For this reason employees must be assured their freedom to choose their own trade representation, which is independent of both State and Party. The right to strike must also be guaranteed.

Freedom of speech and exchange of information. When there is no freedom of speech, national culture cannot develop freely. When all publications are submitted to state censorship before appearing in print, and when the publications and the mass media are state-controlled, the citizens cannot consciously develop an attitude towards decisions taken by the state authorities, while at the same time the State is unaware of the public's attitude to its policy. Some particularly grave consequences of the State's monopoly over publications and the workings of preventive censorship can be seen in literature and art, which do not fulfil their socially significant functions. It must therefore be made possible for the trade unions and for the creative, religious and other societies to bring out books and periodicals without state intervention. Preventive censorship must therefore be abolished, while in the event of an infringement of the publishing statute, the law may be enforced only by means of legal proceedings.

Freedom in education. There can be no freedom in education as long as the criteria for the selection of teaching staff and subjects for study are determined by state authority, and as long as

these criteria are of a political nature. Therefore the academic freedom of the establishments of higher education must be brought back, and the academic circles must not be denied their right of autonomy.

The guarantee of these basic freedoms cannot be reconciled with the now officially-prepared declaration regarding the leading role of one of the parties in the system of state authority. Such constitutional recognition would give that political party the status of an instrument of state authority, not responsible to nor controlled by the public. Under such conditions Parliament cannot be regarded as the highest instrument of authority, the government is not the highest executive body, and the courts are not independent.

The right of all citizens to nominate and vote for their representatives according to the accepted democratic principles of free elections must be assured. The courts must be assured of their independence from the executive power, and the highest legislative power must effectively be given to Parliament. We believe that disregard for civil rights may lead to the destruction of the general will, to the dissolution of social unity, to a gradual loss of national identity, and may finally destroy national tradition. Indeed, it constitutes a threat to the nation's very existence.

The above statements are submitted in the belief that the responsibility for the destiny of our society is shared by all.

The recognition of these freedoms, confirmed at the Helsinki Conference, has today assumed international importance, for where there is no freedom, there can be neither peace nor security.

Statement of Polish Bishops

The many protests against the Party's proposed changes in the Polish Constitution included some from the Polish bishops. In March 1976, the Secretariat of the Polish Episcopate compiled the following "Explanatory Statement" which expressed the Church's views on the matter.

The Catholic community in Poland is

interested in the position taken by the Episcopate as regards the proposed changes to the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic. A short communiqué on the matter was issued for the information of the faithful on 18 February immediately after the 151st Episcopal Conference. The faithful are making numerous enquiries about the Church and the rights of believers under the