

Documents

Pastoral Letter from Polish Bishops

On 17 September 1978 the following Pastoral Letter, written for Mass Media Day, was read in all Polish Roman Catholic Churches. This is an unprecedented attack on the Polish government. At the beginning of this year Cardinal Wyszynski demanded freedom of expression and criticized Polish censorship: on 6 January he preached in Warsaw Cathedral, stating that "censorship places blinkers on the eyes of the people". On 8 March Cardinal Wojtyla attacked the atheist views expressed in the mass media. Now all the Polish bishops demand that the mass media be freed from government control.*

Beloved in Lord Jesus,

In accordance with a recommendation of the Holy Father Paul VI, we wish to discuss today matters concerning the consumers of the mass media, their expectations, duties and privileges. Since the Second Vatican Council it has been accepted that the mass media mean the press, periodicals, radio, television, cinema and suchlike. As a product of human thought, all of them are the property of the whole human family. Everybody has the right to use them and to receive the contents disseminated by them. The Church, through the use of the media, wants to popularize spiritual and religious values and thereby strengthen the unity of mankind.

Alas, the Church in Poland today, even though it has been co-operating with national culture since the beginnings of the existence of the State, nev-

ertheless has not only been refused the right to possess the mass communication media, in particular radio, television and the daily press, but also has not been able to use them actively. All the media have been taken over by the State, and made to serve the ideology which aims at bringing human beings up without God.

There is always some kind of a drama in man's creative activity. Everything created by him to serve the benefits, development and [word indistinct] of people is very frequently used to harm people. This also applies to such inventions as the radio, television, the cinema and press. These media, in accordance with our expectations, should serve the cause of unifying the people through the exchange of cultural achievements, spiritual and religious values, and through the flow of information on the problems and living conditions of people and whole human communities in various parts of the world. They should stimulate a caring interest in others, concerns beyond the circle of one's own interests, and should contribute towards popularizing the feeling of brotherhood among people, promoting all that is beautiful, noble and worth seeking and working for.

Today, however, things are not as they should be. The mass communication media are abused in order to impose one kind of view only, and one behaviour pattern only, and to exert power over people. People who have taken over today's press, radio, television and theatre consider only their own

* Now Pope John Paul II.—Ed.

goals. By controlling the media, they feed us with their views. As citizens of our own fatherland we have rights which cannot be relinquished. "We have the right to expect information which is rapid, honest, objective and which respects the hierarchy of values", Pope Paul VI reminds us in this year's message on Mass Media Day.

We have the right and, indeed, we have the duty to criticize and evaluate the contents that are conveyed to us by radio, television and theatre. We have the right to expect that this criticism will be heard and taken into consideration when preparing programmes. To ignore our opinion, the opinion of consumers, is to treat us as objects to be freely manipulated by those who have acquired power over citizens – citizens who have been deprived of the right to pronounce their views publicly.

Finally, we have the right to receive respect and serious consideration for our convictions, our national and Christian culture, our customs and those values which for thousands of years have been the pride of our nation.

We must express regret over cases of persecution of people who have the courage to pronounce orally, and in writing, their judgements and opinions concerning public affairs and the content of what is published by the mass media.

All consumers of the content of mass media have important duties. Pope Paul VI says in his message: "A consumer must have an active attitude". We must, therefore, evaluate the content of what is published by press, radio, television, the cinema and theatre, remembering always their source. We must supplement the content from other, more reliable, sources. We must, if necessary, protest in the ways which are available to us. We have the moral duty to protest whenever the principles of faith and Christian morality are offended, and when people who have no opportunity of defending themselves are attacked.

In order to be able to assume an active posture *vis-à-vis* the press, radio, television, and other mass communication media, we must take on the toil and duty of self-education, so that the pressure exerted now by these media may not blunt, or even destroy in us, the capacity for critical assessment. The

recipient must have three kinds of ability in order to become a fully mature and responsible citizen, said the Pope in this year's message. He must have the ability to understand the language of the mass communication media, the ability to make a correct choice among the transmitted materials, and the ability to make an appraisal.

The first period of education in this sphere must take place within the family. The understanding, choice, and assessment of materials transmitted by these media must form part of a common plan of preparation for life. The basic duty to assist children and young people in making a choice belongs to you, parents and tutors. It is necessary, therefore, to become acquainted with publications, film and television programmes which attract young people, in order to be able subsequently to talk to them on this subject and to shape critical minds.

Parents and tutors, you cause great moral harm to children if you allow them to watch programmes which are unsuitable for them. A television or radio set which is constantly switched on in your home can help break up family life, impoverish minds, and it can deprive you of the valuable effects of personal human ties.

We all know that the spirit of freedom is the proper climate for the full development of a person. Without freedom a person is stunted, and all progress dies. Not to allow people with a different social and political ideology to speak, as is the practice of the State, is unjust. State censorship has always been and remains a weapon of totalitarian systems. With the aid of censorship, the aim is not only to guide the mental life of society, public opinion, but even to paralyse the cultural and religious life of the whole people. Social life requires frankness and freedom of public opinion. Censorship places blinkers on the eyes of people, said the Primate of Poland in his sermon delivered on 6 January in Warsaw Cathedral. It misinforms them and – what is even worse – releases them from responsibility for the nation.

Very often people do not know the truth, they do not know the true state of affairs, and in consequence they do not feel responsible for the situation in

the social, economic or moral sphere. The limitation or even abolition of the interference of censorship is needed. It is being demanded at present by all people who think in terms of the welfare of the nation, irrespective of ideological or socio-political orientation. The authorities must not ignore this widely expressed demand, if they really have the welfare of the nation at heart.

The Polish people, who for a thousand years have been living and growing in Christian culture, need religious literature, and most of all the Holy Scripture, which is the most important book for a believing person because it contains the living word of God. We need catechisms and religious books for children and young people. For 8,000,000 children at junior and senior schools, a total of only 300,000 copies of catechisms were published in Poland in 1977, which means that there was one catechism for 26 people. We need prayer-books, especially to prepare people for their first Communion. Older people also await them.

We are experiencing a great shortage of Catholic periodicals. We regard as such only those publications which are guided by the truths of religion and Christian morality, and which are based on Catholic social teaching. The total edition of the three Catholic weeklies, *Gosc Niedzielnny, Przewodnik Katolicki* and *Tygodnik Powszechny*, amounts to only 190,000 copies, while the demand for these periodicals reaches many millions. It cannot be deemed normal when

Catholics cannot purchase Catholic periodicals and religious books. A Catholic society feels the need for at least one independent Catholic daily.

Just treatment of believing people demands that the Church be allowed to transmit on radio and television the Holy Mass, with a sermon on Sundays and church holidays. This is necessary in particular for those who, for various reasons, cannot physically take part in this most important miracle of the Church.

The Episcopate has appealed many times to the authorities to allow broadcasts by radio of religious programmes for those who are ill and suffering. We have the right to expect the voice of millions of believing citizens of our country to be heard.

Considering the need, or indeed the duty, to supplement information by using other sources, we encourage you to use Vatican Radio, which broadcasts church news, speeches of the Pope and religious conferences.

Putting before you our worries, we wish that they may become your concern as well. We shall all act on them and, above all, we shall pray to Him who is the Lord of Heaven and Earth and who controls all things. We join you in this sincere prayer and we bless you in the name of the Holy Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, Amen.

THE 164TH PLENARY CONFERENCE OF THE
POLISH EPISCOPATE.
SIGNED BY CARDINALS, ARCHBISHOPS AND
BISHOPS OF POLAND.

Polish Censorship Instructions

A collection of instructions for Polish censors was smuggled out of Poland last year. These secret documents have been published by Aneks, a Polish political quarterly (61 Dorset Road, London W.5.) under the title Czarna Ksiega Cenzury PRL (The Black Book of Polish Censorship). The section which deals with religious matters is published for the first time in English translation (© Keston College) with the kind permission of the publishers.

PART X: RELIGIOUS MATTERS

1. All criticism of Marxism should be deleted from religious publications. The-

oretical treatises with polemical comments relating to the Marxist concept of religion, communism, the individual and society, can only be published in specialized books on philosophical and theological problems, and in the following specialized journals:

Collectanea Theologica
Yearbook of the Academy of Christian Theology
Studia Philosophiae Christianae
Studia Theologica Varsoviensia
Zeszyty Naukowe (The scientific papers) of the Catholic University of Lublin