

Editorial

Should Christians allow their religion to be "locked up in the private sphere"? This is the wish of most East European governments where a Communist Party is in power. But for many Christians a split between their religion and the rest of their life makes nonsense of their belief in the Incarnation. That God and man, though distinct and unconfused, have been united means that prayer and the sacraments are an integral part of man's daily life and that his beliefs should influence the society in which he lives. According to a new Polish unofficial journal, *Spotkania* (*Encounters*), there is tension in the Polish Church between those who stress commitment to temporal affairs and those who stress the "primacy of the spiritual". A recent editorial in the *Tablet* (6 January) refers to a "Polish thesis" which is said to represent the Polish Church's view of its relations with the State: according to this the Church accepts restrictions imposed by the State and confines itself to pastoral work without interfering in political and social matters. But this view does not seem to be generally held either by the hierarchy or by the faithful.

Fr Wisniewski, a Dominican, in *Spotkania* No. 2 argues against separating religious from secular life, prayer from activity. Indeed one of the Church's primary tasks, he states, is to work out the connection between the two. But this does not mean that he identifies the sacred with the secular, or spiritual salvation with social reform as in the theology of liberation, of which we have been hearing much since the Pope's recent visit to Mexico. The Church in Poland under Cardinal Wyszyński's leadership sees clearly that its goal is the salvation of man and not socio-political reform as an end in itself. The Polish episcopate, it seems, would thoroughly endorse the Pope's view that church leaders are not meant to be politicians but should feed the souls of men. Nonetheless, far from withdrawing into the "private sphere", many Catholics in Poland, and particularly the young, are concerned about the society in which they live. That is why they have become involved in the opposition movement. Piotr Jegliński and Alexander Tomsy mention some of the main strands in this movement (see their article pp. 23-8).

One of the first signs of opposition among Catholics became noticeable in 1973 at the Catholic University of Lublin. The students objected to the 'authorities' attempt to control the Polish Student Union and for the first time insisted on electing their own representative body. In 1976 some of the Catholic students persuaded a visiting delegation of English students to read out at an official student gathering in Warsaw an open letter giving examples of discrimination. In the same year many young Catholics supported the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR) (formed after the arrest of workers following the 1976 strikes) and helped to re-print and distribute KOR leaflets. Now a group of young Catholics are producing *Spotkania*, which aims at working out a Christian social programme for Poland. Christian moral norms must be applied to every aspect of social life. The first issue of *Spotkania* is strongly critical of present-day Poland, of its materialism and of its totalitarian political system which, the editor claims, is undermining moral values. Total control over education and the mass media, pressure to collectivize private agricultural holdings, the struggle against the Church and interference with family life are all helping to disintegrate Polish society.

The tension in the Polish Church, to which Fr Wisniewski refers, is linked to a basic question which faces any Church: what should be rendered unto Caesar and what unto God? Christians have always differed in their interpretation of this text. In the USSR certain sects refuse to have any dealing whatsoever with the political authorities, whereas other Christian denominations recognize that certain concessions have to be made if organized church life is to exist at all under Soviet conditions. In Poland, where in comparison the Church is in a much stronger position, the episcopate considers that Caesar has claimed more than his due. The bishops, far from accepting the State's restrictions, have been demanding recognition of the Church's legal status and an end to censorship. Before October 1977, when for the first time the leader of the Polish Church met the Party leader, Mr Gierek, there was no dialogue between Church and State; now there is. According to official Party pronouncements there is no conflict between Church and State, but in fact the episcopate has made clear that there are still many points of difference.