

Developments in the Polish Churches During 1981

The Church in Poland during 1981: before the imposition of martial law

On 15 April the Ministry of Education circulated a Memorandum stating that all children in state-organized summer camps should have the opportunity to attend church on Sundays and major feast-days. Formerly children were prevented from attending church during summer camps and this was an area of confrontation between the Polish Episcopate and the authorities. A subsequent even more significant instruction officially removed state supervision over religious instruction and declared catechization of children and young people to be "an internal matter for the Church". The Church was free to give instruction in catechetical centres, in private flats and even on school premises (which had been illegal since 1961) when there was no other suitable place. In such areas the local authorities were to give permission to construct a catechetical centre.

Permission to pursue pastoral work in prisons, reformatories, hospitals and welfare houses was also granted. Special Masses for the sick could be broadcast every Sunday and patients were able to attend Masses celebrated on hospital premises. Hospital authorities have been charged with providing a place suitable for the conduct of worship.

When the joint government—episcopal commission was reinstated in September 1980 after thirteen years of inactivity it was viewed with distrust by many. It appears now that in fact it won a number of important concessions from the state, though because of the imposition of martial law it is not certain which of them will be honoured.

First came the changes in the censorship regulations when a new bill on censorship was passed by the Polish Parliament on 31 July. (The bill came into effect in October 1981). The bill excluded from censorship all books, pictures and recordings of a religious character published by the Church (or other religious associations): church documents, pastoral letters, parish notices, liturgical texts, prayer books etc. Religious ceremonies could be broadcast live on radio and television and cultural performances organized on church premises were also excluded from prior censorship.

In the summer permission was granted for five Catholic papers to be published.

Four of them, the weekly *Niedziela* (Sunday), the monthly *Przegląd Powszechny* (Universal Review), *Rycerz Niepokalanej* (Knight of the Immaculate Mary) and *Posłaniec Serca Jezusa* (The messenger of the heart of Jesus), are pre-war papers. They were re-established in 1945 and existed until 1953, when all Catholic papers were closed down. The fifth, *Communio*, is a new theological review, which appeared after the Second Vatican Council in the West. It aims to promote modern Catholic thought. (Cardinal Wojtyła—now Pope John Paul II—was one of the founders and editors of the paper.) Out of the five only *Niedziela* and *Communio* actually appeared. The first issues of the other three were planned for January 1982

179th Plenary Conference of the Polish Episcopate

The first conference of the Polish Episcopate since the death of Cardinal Wyszyński on 28 May took place on 25-26 June under the chairmanship of Cardinal Franciszek Macharski of Krakow. The bishops described the current situation in Poland as "days of historic trial" on which the future of Poland and the whole of Europe could depend. They considered that Poland's recent history revealed the ability of Solidarity and the authorities to solve conflicts in "a worthy and reasonable manner" and also their will to struggle for socio-political renewal and to lead Poland out of crisis. The bishops felt, however, that reconstruction of the foundation of national life greatly endangered Poland's sovereignty and independence, and appealed to both Solidarity and the authorities to "disregard petty conflicts and to consolidate unity in solving problems decisive for national and state life", in order to avert the threat of outside intervention. "Our country is now facing various threats", the bishops stated. "We must recall the words of the late Polish Primate, Cardinal Wyszyński, in St John's Cathedral in Warsaw on 6 January 1981: 'We need a mighty will to organise all the forces of our nation in order not to yield to the temptation of a new Targowica, no matter whence it might come.'" (The Confed-

eration of Targowica, a union of conservative and pro-Russian forces in Poland against the national renaissance movement, caused the second partition of Poland by Russia, Prussia and Austro-Hungary in 1793.) The bishops stated: "Poland has the right to shape her history, in which the nation consciously moulds its fate. Today we confirm this discipline and sovereign will to live in national dignity and in permanent accord with everybody. This is extremely important for our country and the whole of Europe."

180th Plenary Conference of the Polish Episcopate

A two-day plenary conference of the Polish Episcopate began in Gniezno on 14 September, immediately following the installation of the new Polish Primate, Archbishop Jozef Glemp. A critical evaluation of the current situation in the country and the tasks facing the Church featured high on the agenda. In their communiqué the bishops expressed their deep concern over the latest tensions, warned against possible confrontation and emphasized the need to find anew the path to negotiation. In the bishops' view, the current difficulties were caused by lack of understanding and mistrust between the authorities and the people, and were exacerbated by one-sided information which often departed from the truth. The bishops pointed to the value to both government and people of the Pope's latest encyclical, *Laborem Exercens*, published while the conference was in session. (The encyclical deals with the rights and responsibilities of workers and their role in social and economic life, emphasizing that they cannot serve individual or group interests but must take into consideration the restriction of existing economic circumstances. It is the task of trades unions to work for the common good and seek to repair what is defective in the system of possessing and managing the means of production. They should not, however, acquire the attributes of political parties struggling for power nor maintain excessively close links with such parties, lest they become their instruments.) The communiqué ended on an optimistic note as the bishops, in spite of their fears and anxieties, still saw hope in the general will for change in the country's social and economic life which united all Poles.

Pastoral Letter for Mass Media Day

The 180th Plenary Conference of the Polish Episcopate issued a Pastoral Letter for Mass Media Day, 20 September, which was read out in churches throughout the country. The bishops challenged the lack of freedom of expression in Poland and the monopoly of the media by the communist authorities. "It is unacceptable", they wrote, "that freedom of speech should be denied only because the views which would be publicly expressed are inconvenient to some or are not in line with the concepts of one particular group. It is unacceptable that one group in society should have a monopoly in using the mass media to promote just one ideology. The pluralism of a modern society requires that all groups in it have access to the mass media". The bishops pointed out also that the existing bias of the Polish media violates the basic human right to make a free choice to side with truth and good in accordance with one's convictions. "This choice", claimed the bishops, "can be made only when the information carried by the media is objective and complete".

The Catholic Church and the Solidarity Congress

The first Solidarity Congress took place in Gdansk in September 1981, attended by 986 elected delegates from all over the country as well as invited guests and representatives of several foreign labour organisations. Among the guests the Catholic Church was particularly in evidence. The opening of the Congress itself was preceded by a Mass conducted by Poland's new Primate, Archbishop Jozef Glemp, and attended by most delegates. The second day also began with a special service, conducted in the hall where the discussions took place. During the service Fr Jozef Tischner, a prominent Catholic theologian and lecturer at Krakow Theological Academy, delivered a sermon; it was so liked by the delegates that they decided to include it among the official congressional documents.

The Church's role was not limited, however, to religious services. Its symbolic presence was clearly marked by a cross hung prominently at the front of the debating hall, next to a national emblem, just above the podium. There were also many references to the Church and religion in speeches by various delegates, and the official report by the National Coordinating Commission emphasized that the movement had en-

joyed constant support from the Church in its various activities. This link between the Church and Solidarity was also emphasised by Pope John Paul II, who, speaking on 6 September to a group of pilgrims from Poland, asked for special prayer for the congress. The delegates in turn sent him a greetings telegram on 7 September.

A new era of Ecumenism in Poland?

On 25 September 1981, the day after his accession, the new Polish Primate, Archbishop Jozef Glemp, received at his residence a delegation from the Polish Ecumenical Council, the Warsaw Christian Theological Academy and the Bible Society. The delegation, led by W. Benedyktynowicz, the chairman of the Polish Ecumenical Council, also included Metropolitan Basili, head of the Orthodox Church, Bishop J. Narzynski, head of the Lutheran Church and Fr. Majewski, a leader of the Polish Catholic Church. On 4 November, Archbishop Glemp, accompanied by his secretary, Fr. Piasêcki, visited the headquarters of the Polish Ecumenical Council. These meetings had historic significance as the late Cardinal Wyszynski had never officially met members of the Polish Ecumenical Council. The Catholic Church has never been a member of the Council. One of Cardinal Wyszynski's auxiliary bishops, Bishop W. Miziolek, head of the Episcopal Commission for Ecumenism, participated in the Council meetings but only as an observer. On 4 November, both the Archbishop and his hosts expressed their will and desire to continue such meetings in future.

181st Conference of the Polish Episcopate

The 181st Plenary Conference of the Polish Episcopate met on 25-26 November 1981 in Warsaw. In their communiqué the bishops reminded their countrymen that a second visit from the Pope was expected in August 1982 (the official announcement was made on 7 November by the Pope during a meeting with the Polish Primate Jozef Glemp and members of the Main Council of the Bishop's Conference in Rome) and called on them to prepare for the event in a spirit of national reconciliation.

The bishops drew a grim picture of the current situation in Poland: "The country is faced with the threat of civil war and loss of all gains so far achieved", they stated and

warned that they saw no other way of overcoming the crises unless all Poles, individuals and organizations, united in their endeavours.

The bishops strongly criticised the authorities for hampering the process of bridge-building between the government and the people. They warned that no understanding or reconciliation would be possible if there were no freedom of expression. "The television and press should not issue half-truths, for this leads to deceitfulness and arouses peoples' anger . . . At such a difficult time, all sides should make responsible use of their word. The word has great dignity, but if its strength is misused it can be harmful and arouse hatred". The bishops still believe however, that "there are no problems which Poles themselves cannot solve despite political or confessional differences". They urged: "all prejudices and interest groups now have to be subordinated to the common good". They emphasised that only through negotiation between all concerned sides could the future of the country be protected.

The Episcopate also appealed for the removal of all sources of tension, present and future, as soon as they developed in order to avoid strikes which wasted the country's material and moral resources. They called on workers and farmers as well as intellectuals to guard the unity seen so strongly in August 1980 and reminded them that it was their solidarity that had achieved so many gains.

Commenting on the recent meeting between Lech Walesa, General Jaruzelski and Archbishop Josef Glemp on 4 November, the Episcopate pointed out that they themselves considered it their duty to use the position of high moral authority they hold in Polish society for the good of the country. The bishops stressed that this role should never be misinterpreted as a political one.

Cardinal Wyszynski

Since the death of Cardinal Wyszynski in May 1981 there have been a number of exhibitions, lectures and broadcasts on his life and teachings. A special committee has been formed in Warsaw with the aim of building a monument to the Cardinal, funds for which are expected to come both from Poland and Poles living abroad. There is also a project to cast a bell to be named Stefan. It is planned that "Stefan" would be blessed on the first anniversary of Cardinal

Wyszynski's death or during the Pope's expected visit to Poland in August 1982.

Koran in Polish

According to the Islamic newspaper *Preporod* in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia, a Polish translation of the Koran and commentary translated and published outside Poland will be paid for by the Moroccan government. The Koran will be distributed free of charge by Muslims in Poland. They number about two thousand. The community is of Tatar origin. Apart from two Muslim vil-

lages in the region of Bialystok, the remainder of the community is dispersed throughout the country with the majority living in Warsaw. There are only two mosques, in Bohoniki and Kruszyniany. In the remaining communities religious services are held in specially prepared rooms. In 1980, the Muslim World League (Rabita) was approached for practical assistance in extending contacts between Polish Muslims and the worldwide Muslim Community.

GRAZYNA SIKORSKA

Croatian Controversy

A sharp dispute between the Catholic Church in Croatia and the Croatian authorities which began early in 1981 has still not died down. At a press conference in January 1981, Jakov Blazevic, president of the Croatian presidency, made a violent attack on the late Cardinal Stepinac (the wartime Archbishop of Zagreb, subsequently tried and imprisoned by the communist government), and on the leaders of the Catholic Church in Croatia today who attempt to rehabilitate his memory, and he attacked Croatian workers abroad. Blazevic, who was public prosecutor at Stepinac's trial, was launching the third volume of his memoirs, dealing with the events of the war and the fascist "Independent State of Croatia" which he accused Stepinac of helping to install.

Church leaders reacted immediately. Mgr Stankovic of the Zagreb archdiocese, who is director of spiritual care for Croats abroad, protested at the insulting references to Stepinac and at the attacks clearly aimed at Cardinal Seper, prefect of the congregation for the doctrine of the faith and a Croat, and Archbishop Kuharic of Zagreb. Stankovic's statement was broadcast by Radio Vatican's Croatian service and published in Zagreb by the Catholic news agency bulletin AKSA. Cardinal Seper made a dignified and temperate statement, referring to the long years during which he had known Stepinac and recalling the witnesses called by the defence at his trial who were not allowed to give evidence. This statement was also broadcast in full by Radio Vatican and published by AKSA. The following day Archbishop Kuharic preached a sermon at the Mass on the anniversary of Stepinac's death. He refuted Blazevic's accusations point by point, giving docu-

mentary references, and concluded by saying that he had no wish to embitter relations with anyone and would not have raked over the past in this way unless he had been forced to it. AKSA reported the full text of the sermon and Radio Vatican broadcast recorded excerpts from it.

It is unlikely that Blazevic's outburst at the press conference had been agreed in advance with other members of the government. Blazevic has a notoriously rough manner, and as an old Partisan still occupying a leading position feels free to say whatever he pleases. However, other leading members of the government in Croatia may have felt that the matter could not be allowed to drop after the Church had reacted, and a number of them entered the fray including Jure Bilic, president of the Croatian assembly, and Dusan Dragosavac, secretary of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. Branko Puharic, a member of the presidium of the Socialist Alliance (Popular Front) and director of Zagreb Radio-TV, referred to the excellent relations between Yugoslavia and the Vatican, based on the protocol signed in 1966 which established a framework for relations between the Church and the State, and accused "some reactionary individuals within the Church" of trying to revive "Stepinac's Church" and make it a focus of political opposition and a tool of Croatian nationalism. He brushed aside the polemics about Stepinac as irrelevant, but said that if anyone tried to "take Stepinac out of political mothballs" the authorities would say exactly what they thought of the late archbishop. The theme was followed up by Zlatko Uzelac, Minister of the Interior of Croatia, who accused the hierarchy of looking increasingly for sup-

port to the clergy working among Croats abroad, especially those who had links with the hostile emigration. The national press commented widely on the affair, and a leading Split daily *Slobodna Dalmacija* (*Free Dalmatia*) hoped that the Vatican was not behind these attempts to worsen relations with the Catholic Church.

Blazevic's initial attack on Stepinac was intemperate but may have been triggered off by the increasing fervour of Archbishop Kuharic's sermons each year on the anniversary of Stepinac's death. The authorities may have decided it was time to hit back and to put the Church on the defensive by accusing it of attempting to become the focus of a political opposition. There is no evidence that the hierarchy wants anything of the sort, but there is a strongly nationalistic element among the clergy, and the celebrations of the 1300th anniversary of the arrival of Christianity in Croatia and the unbroken links since then with the Papacy were bound to rouse nationalistic fervour. The authorities have also to keep in mind the feelings of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian minority in Croatia who still, unfortunately, identify Stepinac with the mass slaughter and mass conversion of Serbs during the last war by the Croatian *ustasa* government. It is understandable that the Church wants to see Stepinac rehabilitated, but tactically their insistence may have given a handle to the communists for the sweeping attack on the Catholic Church.

It seemed at one moment that the hullabaloo might be dying down, but fuel was unexpectedly added to the fire by the reported appearances of the Virgin to six children in a remote mountain parish in Hercegovina, and the resulting rush of between 20,000 and 30,000 people to this inconvenient site, drawn by religious fervour or simple curiosity. (*See the article on pp. 4-9—Ed.*) When comparisons with Lourdes and Fatima began to be made the authorities cracked down hard. Other minor incidents took place; a new mosaic put into a church in Slavonia was alleged to include a likeness of the late Cardinal Stepinac, and a small shrine on the Dalmatian coast was bulldozed by the local authorities. The church claimed that notification had been perfunctory and inadequate, the local authorities

said that they had warned the church in 1971 and again last year that the additions to the shrine infringed local planning regulations and the overall UNESCO plan for the development of the coast, and that they had deferred destruction until after the recent eucharistic congress when they had given the church every assistance with traffic control. etc. (*See p. 80 for further details—Ed.*)

The Yugoslav Catholic Bishop's Conference issued two statements during the course of the year, denying that they were trying to interfere in politics when they defended the right of believers to confess their faith without hindrance or made moral judgements of questions of basic human rights; they protested against unfounded accusations made against the clergy who were given no right of reply, and they noted sadly that marxist atheism was taught to children in school as the only world view, and religion and the history of the churches were presented in a distorted, unscholarly way. This provoked the retort in the communist press that the bishops were putting themselves above criticism and were trying to alienate believers from "self-management socialism".

In the meantime relations between Church and State continue to be frequently discussed at party meetings, conferences and gatherings of the Socialist Alliance, the broad popular front organization. Every effort is made to distinguish between the general body of believers, who are assured that they are not second-class citizens and encouraged to co-operate in the building of socialism, and reactionary church leaders who encourage "clericalism". At the same time "sectarianism" within the ranks of the Party i.e. a hard-line approach to religion, is severely discouraged. A new and encouraging initiative has been a two-part symposium on religion, in which Marxist sociologists, Catholic theologians and representatives of several Protestant churches took part; it was arranged by Sarajevo TV and carried on all the major broadcasting stations. (*See p. 78-9 for further details—Ed.*)

Polemics in the national press still continue, and it is difficult at present (February 1982) to predict when and whether they will die down.

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