

A Polish Strategy for Non-Violent Change

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Much has been written about the period of Polish Solidarity and the rôle of the Roman Catholic Church in the events leading up to August 1980.* Political and religious analysts have also devoted considerable attention to the apparent defeat of the independent trade union movement by the imposition of martial law and the Church's attempts to mediate between society and the authorities. In this context there are signs that a Polish strategy for non-violent change is developing. Details are emerging which throw further light on the Church's contribution to the character of Poland's renewal under Solidarity and the implications of this strategy for related peace issues in Poland. One of the distinguishing characteristics of Solidarity's "quiet revolution" was the determination to avoid the kind of bloody confrontations between workers and police which marked the events of 1956 and 1970. "This revolution killed nobody," said the Polish philosopher Leszek Kołakowski. "Solidarity was not a Peace movement, but it was a supremely peaceful movement."¹

There is no independent peace movement in Poland such as those which have recently emerged in East Germany, Hungary and Moscow. Even the official press in Poland carries relatively little "peace propaganda". Polish participation in international peace conferences such as the Christian Peace Conference and Pugwash have been consistent but inconsequential. The official Polish Peace Committee completely lacks credibility at home and abroad. Poland's long history of struggle against foreign domination and occupation has created a reverence for things military which even 35 years of communist control of the armed forces has been unable to erode. Many Poles are openly scornful of western peace movements and mass demonstrations for nuclear disarmament and tend to dismiss them as propaganda exercises, directly or indirectly orchestrated from Moscow. Nonetheless, Solidarity's struggle for social change was non-violent: a dimension of popular consciousness has been trans-

*See Alexander Tomský, "Poland's Church on the Road to Gdańsk", *RCL* Vol. 1, Nos. 1-2 — *Ed.*

formed by the Church's struggle to defend human dignity against the encroachment of a totalitarian system. Solidarity's revolution was not bloody, one Polish priest maintains, "because above all the Church and other 'dissident' groups made efforts to conduct a struggle without the use of violence. . . This was the position taken throughout the movement initiated in Gdańsk."²

The method of non-violent resistance which evolved out of the Church's experience and exerted an influence upon the free trade union movement was by no means a fully developed principle. "It was present in only rudimentary form, and often adopted in a purely intuitive way, without full awareness. There was a lack of people to provide the theoretical legitimation for this method of struggle and reveal its roots."³ So it was within the Church, where the methods of non-violent resistance had been adopted and adapted, that an attempt was made to develop and promote non-violence as a principle based on Christian moral teaching. Commitment to non-violence has been expressed in a variety of forms and from a variety of sources in recent years. It has emerged as a liberation movement using truth as a weapon and the overcoming of fear as a shield. It emphasises the importance of inner freedom, personal integrity and sacrifice for others. The renunciation of violence as an effective or ethically justifiable means of bringing about social change is a central tenet of the movement.

The most articulate and forceful expression of this principle is to be found in the literature of the Oasis, or Light-Life movement.⁴ Primarily active among the youth, the Light-Life movement has been teaching a Gospel of practical Christianity which effectively combines elements of revivalist Christian encounter, Bible-study fellowship groups, charismatic dynamism and traditional Polish Catholic piety. It teaches individual commitment to live according to Christian conscience, willingness to suffer for bearing testimony to the truth, and the overcoming of the fear associated with personal and social bondage. The hatred and desire for revenge often associated with struggle are rejected, and "service of liberation through truth" is to be guided by mercy and love for one's fellow-man, following the example of Christ. The Light-Life movement clearly recognises the implications of this theological orientation:

In choosing this way we unite ourselves with the world-wide movement for liberation through non-violence, which is engaged in the great work of freeing people from all bondage and violence following the example of Christ as shown in the Gospels. It is a way which renounces on principle the use of all violence, endeavouring to restore justice and freedom in such a way that those causing injustice and subjugation are liberated as well.⁵

The movement clearly dissociated itself from any kind of utopian withdrawal from the difficulties surrounding it. In a statement entitled "Concerning the involvement of Oasis members in combatting the nation's current problems", a conference of the movement's leaders addressed this very question. Faced with national economic disaster, political upheaval and social crisis,

members of the Light-Life movement may be tempted to escape . . . by forming communities . . . which become "oases" where people feel at peace with themselves and forget about the problems and sufferings of their brothers. While there is a need for such "oases", offering people the opportunity to be spiritually refreshed through rediscovery of life's true meaning and perspective, those who have found such "oases" should be all the more encouraged to develop a greater sense of responsibility towards their suffering brothers and a fuller commitment to overcoming the problems of the society in which they live.⁶

The concept of "inner sovereignty" has been developed to clarify the relationship between inner spiritual resources and effective social activity:

The highest degree of sovereignty is attained by those who in their struggle for liberation, overcome hatred and violence. Meeting force with force — even if it is done against great odds and involves authentic heroism — must be recognised as a form of revolution which is out of date. Humanity today, at its present level of development, has worked out a form of revolution which excludes the use of force and violence and is cleansed of hatred; it raised up human dignity in full sovereignty. This revolution, which is rooted in the Gospels and Christianity, and whose spiritual fathers in contemporary history have been Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr, has proved itself effective in the social-political sphere, and characterised the Polish revolution of 1980 and Solidarity.⁷

The applicability of this strategy has been maintained and refined in the light of the imposition of martial law. The declaration continues:

There is no concern more important at the present time than maintaining the Polish struggle for liberation and refusing to let ourselves be led down the old road of revolution by confrontation, whose symbol is the barricade.⁸

The elements of this continuing struggle include the formation of cell groups throughout the country, of which the family is the most important; the organisation of a system of independent education; the reactivation of

charitable works in cooperation with the Church; and the co-ordination of direct resistance activities in the social-political sphere.

Another equally important principle in this struggle against violence and tyranny is the renunciation of hatred, revenge, violence and all forms of terrorism. This principle cannot be based solely on practical grounds; it is not merely a way to avoid sacrifice and the shedding of blood. Rather, in this way a person maintains his dignity and becomes fully sovereign, achieving a spiritual victory over those who use unjust violence. The way of non-violence must become the Polish way to liberation because it is the way which always leads to victory, even when it demands sacrifice. It is the way of defeating evil with good, the way of saving human dignity, which is the ultimate goal of our struggle.⁹

This vision has been expanded by Fr Blachnicki, the founder of the Oasis movement, into a programme for the liberation of all Central European nations. The programme's manifesto reads:

The Christian inspiration of the programme for the liberation of Central European nations also connects it with the non-violent method of liberation, with the renunciation of force and hatred. . . . By using this method, not only are the negative results of revolution avoided . . . but also it helps to liberate those people, our brothers, who have become unwilling instruments of tyrants and the system of enslavement. The Polish experience of Solidarity's revolution, undertaken in the name of truth, should become the source of inspiration for all the nations of Central Europe. Likewise, the experiences of these peoples should be made known for the common benefit of all.¹⁰

This evaluation of the Church's role in the Polish struggle for social justice and peace is not confined to the Oasis movement. Bohdan Cywiński, the eminent Catholic writer and editor, has also described the development of Solidarity in terms of the Church's central role as a defender of human dignity and truth. In the Polish situation, he explains:

Christianity has not been merely a vague inspiration, but rather has supplied a clear hierarchy of values: inner freedom, the capacity for suffering in the service of others, courage, the prudence to live through terror with a sense of freedom and stand firm in the face of contradiction, readiness to act without violence, without breaking a window.¹¹

The journalist Stefan Bratkowski has also testified to the central importance of non-violence. In an address in a church outside Warsaw soon

after the imposition of martial law, he argued against terrorism and said: "Polish society should find its unity of purpose by the same methods that Gandhi used".¹² The underground leadership of Solidarity has recently reiterated its commitment to non-violence. While defending the right to self-defence, they say "the use of violence is against our ideals".¹³ Other expressions of support for non-violence can be found in publications of the underground press, the journal *Spotkania* (Encounters), and in statements by Polish bishops.¹⁴

Alongside these testimonies in support of non-violence, several other items emerged during the Solidarity period which deal with another related aspect of social injustice, namely the persecution of conscientious objectors. Within the general context of the many Solidarity committees for the defence of prisoners of conscience which sprang up, an impressive document was produced by an *ad hoc* group calling itself the Committee Against Repression for Objection to Military Service. The purpose of the committee was to advocate legislation for an alternative service option under which the conditions of service would be clearly specified, and clearly-defined legislation established for dealing with those who refuse on the basis of conscience to fulfil the alternative service option.¹⁵ Denying that such a policy would adversely affect the defence capabilities of the country, they concluded that "it is difficult to imagine how society can be authentically educated in the spirit of peace if at the same time people who have already decided to renounce the use of violence are being persecuted".¹⁶ The All-Poland Congress of Regional and Collegiate Committees for the Defence of Political Prisoners issued an appeal for information from the families of those who were imprisoned for refusing to do military service on the basis of their convictions. In closing they addressed themselves to the Polish Sejm (Parliament): "We appeal to the Sejm of the People's Republic of Poland to pass an appropriate law giving these citizens the right to serve in the medical corps in lieu of military service, in accordance with the humanitarian practice of free peoples".¹⁷ The official programme adopted at Solidarity's first national congress contained an article on this issue. Item 25 of the programme reads:

In a justly governed Poland no-one may be persecuted for their convictions, nor compelled to engage in activities contrary to their conscience. . . Regarding those persons whose convictions and religious principles forbid them to do armed military service, the possibility should exist for them to do another kind of public service to fulfil this obligation.¹⁸

An anthology of poems produced in Poland since the imposition of martial law, entitled *Martial Law Poetry*,¹⁹ contains two poems by Ryszard Krynicki which express the non-violent orientation described above. The first, entitled "They Shake With Fear", reads:

Evil is powerless in the face of good,
 Violence is powerless against the defenceless.
 Those who worship violence are small and powerless.
 They shake with fear behind the backs
 Of their secret police, their army, their militia and party.
 Below contempt, they lie, and say, "We don't want bloodshed".
 But then they give the orders to beat, and kill.
 They cry, "history will vindicate us"
 But their crimes have already condemned them.

The second poem is entitled "Goodness is Defenceless":

Goodness is defenceless, but not powerless.
 Goodness does not require power,
 goodness itself is power.
 Goodness does not need to conquer,
 goodness is immortal.

As noted above, non-violent tactics are not altogether new in Poland despite the lack of a strong pacifist tradition. During the Nazi occupation, Poles conducted an active campaign of resistance parallel to their armed struggle which included sit-down strikes, social boycotts, clandestine publishing and an underground system of independent education.²⁰ Since the Second World War, the Church has been able to maintain its independence from state control and has earned the overwhelming confidence of society by its consistent defence of human rights and its reputation for telling the truth. The strength of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland has contributed to the development, concentration and unification of social forces which are engaged in a struggle against the injustices of the system under which they live.

Though neither Solidarity nor the Church has pursued a specific peace agenda in terms of protest against war, the nuclear arms race or the militarisation of society, there seems to be a growing awareness and sensitivity in Poland to issues which are intimately related to the problem of peace. Without condemning the taking up of arms as an act of legitimate self-defence, the conscious adoption of non-violence as a strategy of liberation involves a fundamental shift in the understanding of what freedom means, and clearly places that struggle in the context of a moral imperative based on specifically Christian values. It must be emphasised that the primary focus of Poland's present struggle is liberation — personal, social, political, national. It has been in this context that a method of liberation has been developed which embodies the ends as part of the means. Peace and justice are won by peace and justice.

The significance of the movement for non-violent social and political change in Poland which has developed in a particular situation is that it cannot avoid confronting issues of reconciliation, justice and peace in the international sphere. The programme for the liberation of the Central European nations is one indication of this. Similarly, the call for a legally-

established alternative service option for conscientious objectors is significant not only because it indicates that there are pacifists in Poland. The issue was not pacifism but tolerance, and the need for unambiguous legislation. However, the implications of publicly advocating the defence of conscientious objectors should not be overlooked. In East Germany the Evangelical Church became directly involved in peace issues after having first supported initiatives for setting up some form of alternative peace service.²¹ In Hungary, the basis community movement within the Catholic Church is characterised by its adherence to Christian pacifism and the refusal to do military service. More recently, this has led to the participation of some basis community members in the anti-nuclear initiatives of the new independent Hungarian peace movement.²² These situations are not neat and unequivocal parallels. However, I think that a non-violent struggle for liberation in Poland will have increasingly broader implications for those who advocate it and are engaged in it, and ultimately for the whole of Polish society. Solidarity in exile has already taken up a dialogue with the western peace movement, and there are indications that western peace activists are increasingly sensitive to the particular concerns of their Eastern European counterparts related to human rights.²³

A recent document from Poland seems to support the above assumption. The "Appeal to Christians in Western Europe and North America",²⁴ issued by a group of Polish professors and students, expresses support for the anti-nuclear demonstrations and other independent peace initiatives in the West. It adds that these activities "have created the chance for a peace movement to emerge in Eastern Europe as well". The signatories of the appeal protest against the persecution of pacifists and against the repression of human rights movements in the various Eastern-bloc states. They continue:

We share the view that the ever-increasing tempo of the arms race can produce horrible consequences for all of mankind. By addressing you in this way, we want to encourage you. You should know that there are many people here in Poland who declare their solidarity with you and support you in prayer. Since we live in Eastern Europe, our protests are directed primarily against the deployment of violence — which is experienced here. We are also better informed about the abuses of human rights in this part of the world.

They express support for the initiatives undertaken with the motto "*Frieden Schaffen Ohne Waffen*" (Make Peace Without Weapons), as well as those of the "Dresden Forum" of 13 February 1982.* The

*A "peace forum" sponsored by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony (Dresden) to commemorate the 37th anniversary of the bombing of Dresden.

specific demands listed include the dismantling of Soviet SS-20 missiles in Eastern Europe, the creation of a nuclear-free zone in Europe, agreements for real disarmament between East and West, the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan, the total lifting of martial law in Poland, the cessation of persecution of pacifists and those struggling for civil rights in Eastern Europe and the restoration of the banned trade union Solidarity.

The exact source of this unusual document has not yet been established, though there is no compelling reason to question its authenticity. It is significant because it considers peace and human rights to be part of the same struggle, issues which tend to be polarised in the West.

Although I do not expect the spontaneous eruption of an independent peace movement in Poland in the near future, I think it likely, in light of the above, that the movement for non-violent change in Poland will continue to expand and exert an influence on the way Poles respond to international peace issues.

¹Quoted in "The Other Poland" by Timothy Garton Ash, *The Spectator*, 18 December 1982, p. 11.

²*Prawda-Wyzwolenie, Biuletyn informacyjny chrześcijańskiej Służby pomocy Polsce*, No. 1, styczeń 1982, p. 17 (Rome).

³*Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴For background information about the movement see Grażyna Sikorska, "The Light-Life Movement in Poland", *RCL*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1983, pp. 49-66.

⁵*Wskazania VI Krajowej Kongregacji Odpowiedzialnych Ruchu Światło-Życie dla diakonii i wszystkich uczestników Ruchu*, 1 March 1981, p. 7.

⁶*Deklaracja V Krajowej Kongregacji Odpowiedzialnych Ruchu Światło-Życie w sprawie zaangażowania członków Ruchu w aktualne problemy narodu*, 2 March 1980, pp. 5-6.

⁷"Suwerenność Wewnętrzna", *Deklaracja Carlsberska*, Carlsberg, 29 August 1982, p. 2.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁰*Manifest wyzwolenia narodów Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, Schloss Hambach, 14 November 1982, p. 3.

¹¹*Liberta' Di Educazione*, No. 3, 1981, p. 17.

¹²*Guardian*, 10 January 1983, p. 13.

¹³*Kontakt*, Paris, 1 (9), styczeń 1983, p. 5.

¹⁴See article on pacifism in East Germany in "Sumienie", Tygodnik Regionalnego Komitetu Obrony Więzionych za Przekonania — Mazowsze, Warszawa, No. 5, 1981, pp. 7-8; translation and reprint of article on non-violence by French author in *Spotkania*, Warszawa, Lublin, Kraków, No. 16, 1981; "Słowo Pasterskie Biskupów Polskich", 19 January 1982 and sermon of Archbishop Macharski of Kraków on 6 January 1983, in *Biuro Prasowe Episkopatu Polski*, No. 6, 1983, p. 16.

¹⁵"Sumienie", No. 3, 1981, p. 6; for English translation see *War Resisters' International Newsletter*, No. 186, February 1982, p. 7.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷"Chcemy Być Wolni", Regionalny Komitet Obrony Więzionych za Przekonania "Solidarność", Bydgoszcz, No. 1, 25 May 1981, p. 6.

¹⁸"Program NSZZ Solidarność", included as insert with No. 29 of Solidarity weekly "Solidarność", item 25.

¹⁹*Poezja Stanu Wojennego*, Puls, London, June 1982, p. 31.

²⁰Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, Porter Sargent Publisher, Boston, 1973, pp. 127, 129, 137, 144, 173 n. 7, 188, 196, 232, 304, 399, 403, 404, 554 and 675.

²¹See review of Klaus Ehling and Martin Dallwitz, *Schwerter zu Pflugscharen — Friedensbewegung in der DDR* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: rororo aktuell, Rowohlt, 1982), by Charles Andras in *Radio Free Europe Research, RAD Background Report/177* (German Democratic Republic), 3 September 1982.

²²Ferenc Köszegi and E. P. Thompson, "The New Hungarian Peace Movement", END Special Report, London, nd., pp. 12-13 (booklet).

²³See especially E. P. Thompson, "Healing the Wound", in *END Journal*, No. 1, December 1982-January 1983, pp. 10-11.

²⁴Kathpress (Austrian Catholic News Service), 242, 17 December 1982, p. 4.

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