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# The Catholic Church in Communist Poland, 1945-1955

by *Elizabeth Valkenier*

**I**N POLAND, unlike the other satellites, Communist policy toward the Church in the past ten years has been largely cautious and at times even conciliatory. There were no wholesale persecutions, no spectacular trials like those of Mindszenty or Stepinac. That is not to say that the Communists were willing to tolerate the rival claims of the Church to shape the mind and soul of the population. They merely found it wiser to pursue their goal slowly. The progress toward that goal, involving among other things the signing of a bilateral agreement, provides some insights into the course and outcome of a seemingly mild Communist policy.

Caution was dictated by the strength and determination of the adversary: the Polish Catholic Church was a powerful institution; in prewar days it was an integral part of national life, enjoyed constitutional guarantees of its privileged position, and managed an extensive and well-knit ecclesiastical organization, together with numerous charities, schools, and a sizeable press. After the war, reinforced by a notable revival of religion and able to claim the adherence of about 95 per cent of the population as a result of territorial changes, the Church strove to regain its prewar eminence in the face of radically altered political circumstances.

During the prolonged campaign calculated not to eliminate religion but to bring it under the control of the state, the Communists have used four tactics. The Holy See was chosen as the first target, since direct attacks on the Polish clergy would have met with scant success. To render the Vatican and its policies suspect to Polish Catholics, the regime resorted to the most effective propaganda that could be spread after the war—the charge of pro-German sympathies. Gradually, then, attacks hitherto directed at the Pope were shifted to the Polish clergy. First in a press campaign, then in political trials, charges of subversion were pressed so as to serve warning on Church leaders and to undermine the trust of the people in their clergy.

These two tactics were supplemented by the promotion of dissident groups which challenged the authority of the Church hierarchy. The regime-supported Catholic ranged from "patriotic" priests ready to establish a national church, to "Social Catholics" who sought to reconcile Marxism with Catholicism, short of schism. Eventually, as the propaganda took effect, part of the lower clergy was also arrayed against the episcopate.

Finally, the regime either took over or transferred to state-controlled groups the extensive welfare, educational, and social services which had traditionally linked the Church to and enhanced its influence with, the people.

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Of necessity, the period from Liberation to the January, 1947, elections was one of Communist appeasement. During this period the Church, taking advantage of the comparative freedom of action available to non-Communist groups, opposed Communism vigorously and attempted to regain the rights enjoyed before the war. In March 1945, four months before the return of Poland's Primate, Cardinal Hlond, the Cracow Curia began publication of *Tygodnik Powszechny*. At once the weekly paper became an influential and independent commentator on all current issues. By autumn six other Catholic periodicals had appeared. With equal dispatch Catholic associations and charities resumed their work, and the Catholic University at Lublin and numerous school and seminaries re-opened.

True, there were restrictions. Some Catholic associations were not sanctioned; the Catholic press was subject to censorship; and civil marriage was established by law in January, 1946, as the only form recognized by the state. Yet at the same time the considerable land holdings of the Church were exempted from the land reform promulgated in January, 1946; the prewar ruling on mandatory religious instruction in all public schools was retained, and large sums were appropriated for the reconstruction of bombed churches.

More important, however, with regard to the future position of the Church, the regime undermined its legal status. Of the two documents which had defined this status in the interwar period, the Constitution and the Concordat, the former remained only temporarily in force while the latter was repudiated. The "basic

principles" of the 1921 Constitution<sup>1</sup> were retained until a legislative assembly drafted a new one. But the regime never committed itself as to whether it included among these "basic principles" the recognition of Catholicism's pre-eminence over other faiths and the right of the Church to be governed by canon law.

The circumstances under which the 1925 Concordat was unilaterally repudiated on September 12, 1945, made the regime's intentions more explicit. The reason given was that the Vatican had failed to observe the Concordat's clauses when it authorized German bishops to administer church affairs in Polish territory which had been annexed to the Reich after the 1939 invasion. The step was accompanied by vicious anti-Papal propaganda which charged the Holy See with a long tradition of pro-German and anti-East European policy. The decision to repudiate the Concordat was undoubtedly prompted by the regime's conviction that the Polish hierarchy's unfriendly attitude was supported, if not encouraged, by the Vatican. Moreover, the Vatican had refused to grant recognition to the postwar provisional government,<sup>2</sup> had not revoked the authority of Polish bishops in the territories annexed to Russia, and had refused to appoint permanent bishops for the Oder-Neisse territories until a German peace treaty rendered final the decisions reached at Potsdam.

While the regime was making veiled threats through its anti-Vatican policy, it tried to gain the clergy's cooperation. The conciliatory gestures, such as exempting Church holdings from land reform, and the like, were supplemented by official pronouncements. *Głos Ludu*, the organ of the Workers' [Communist] Party, wondered why the Polish hierarchy did not join in the reform movement, as the hierarchies in the other Russian controlled countries had done, and drew alluring pictures of the Church's enhanced prestige if only the episcopate would find a "common language" with the "democratic camp."<sup>3</sup>

To add substance and cogency to these efforts to win over Catholic opinion, the regime sponsored a small group of so-called Social Catholics headed by Boleslaw Piasecki. Organized in the

<sup>1</sup> The repudiation of the 1935 Constitution in July, 1944, was of no consequence to the status of the Church since that document upheld the Church provisions of the 1921 Constitution.

<sup>2</sup> The Vatican still recognizes the Polish government in London, successor of the wartime exile government.

<sup>3</sup> *Głos Ludu*, July 20, 1946.

fall of 1945, the group included many members of a prewar fascist movement, "Falanga," of which Piasecki had been the leader. They now confessed to having lost their "totalitarian predilections" and wished to join the Marxists in the battle against the old order.<sup>4</sup> It was the function of this group and its weekly, *Dziś i Jutro* (supplemented in March, 1947, by a daily, *Slowo Powszechne*), to encourage Catholics to accept the revolutionary changes and to reconcile Catholicism and Marxism.

Against these pressures the Church leaders remained intransigent. They took no cognizance of the provisional government, with which direct official relations were not established, and missed no opportunity to make known the Church's opposition to the predominant political trends. Pastoral letters and the Catholic press were highly critical of the widespread maladministration of justice, the numerous inroads into private property, and the various totalitarian measures which subjugated the individual to the state. At the time of the June, 1946, referendum the population was advised in a pastoral letter to vote according to its "Catholic conscience." The Catholic press, however, did not hide the episcopate's preference for a two-house parliament, thereby joining with Mikolajczyk's opposition in registering protest against the government.

Official overtures inviting co-operation were answered unequivocally. For example, at the June, 1946, meeting of the Workers' and Socialist Parties, Cyrankiewicz acknowledged the government's desire for better relations. *Tygodnik Powszechny* made a firm reply, asserting that the regime would get cooperation—but on the Church's terms, for Catholicism had its own well-defined program. Moreover, the episcopal organ reminded the Marxists, so eager to promote "democracy," that the essence of a democratic system involved the free operation of several parties with their different programs.<sup>5</sup>

The hierarchy was equally emphatic in responding to the proposals from the *Dziś i Jutro* group (the Social Catholics). The episcopate reiterated that it alone could speak officially and authoritatively for Catholicism. It stated flatly that there could be no question of Catholics ever joining forces with the Marxists. Faithful Catholics had to base their actions on the papal encyclicals, the

<sup>4</sup> *Dziś i Jutro*, April 6-13, 1947.

<sup>5</sup> *Tygodnik Powszechny*, July 21, 1946.

social ideals of which had nothing in common with either the collectivist or the liberal-capitalist programs.

While the episcopate rebuffed any compromise or accommodation, it kept insisting upon Catholic participation in formulating the new marriage legislation, in setting up the new school programs, and in organizing the arts and cultural life. On September 10, 1946, as the time for the first postwar elections approached, the Plenary Conference of bishops issued a statement calling for unhampered Catholic representation in the parliament. The bishops made clear that, since its recent revamping, the Christian Labor Party could no longer claim to represent Catholic principles. As to any future Catholic party, the bishops specified that both its program and its composition must be acceptable to the Church.

But nothing came of this proposal, although President Bierut assured one of the Social Catholics in November that "Catholics have and shall have the same rights as other citizens in Poland to form a political party."<sup>6</sup> Obviously, the regime could not tolerate a party outspokenly opposed to Marxism; likewise, the hierarchy could not support any but an "authentic" Catholic group which would not compromise with materialism.

Even though the Communists did not permit the Catholics to have an independent parliamentary representation they took pains not to alienate Catholic opinion. Thus, the electoral program of the Communist-dominated bloc promised to write into the constitution (to be framed after the January, 1947, elections) not only freedom of conscience and religious belief but also "a special recognition of the rights of the Catholic Church." Seemingly, this took care of the basic demands of the Catholics.

Nevertheless these promises failed to win over the Church. Cardinal Hlond told the faithful to vote "only for such people and electoral programs that do not oppose Catholic teaching and morality." Episcopal letters urged Catholics to make their views felt through the ballot: "Catholics have the right to decide with their votes the most fundamental laws of Polish public life."<sup>7</sup> There was no doubt in anybody's mind that the Church had aligned itself on the side of the opposition.

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<sup>6</sup> *Dzis i Jutro*, December 8, 1946.

<sup>7</sup> Only extracts were published after censorship. *Tygodnik Powszechny*, November 10, 1946.

The rigged elections held in January, 1947, resulted in an "overwhelming victory" of the Communists and brought an end to the provisional character of the postwar political situation. Substantial changes followed in the relations between Church and State.

Faced with an entrenched Communist government, the leaders of the Church ceased to combat the regime. Instead they undertook to temper its policies—a move based upon the assumption that state power should be limited by ecclesiastical privilege, for only the Church can bring moral values into public life.

This new approach did not mean that the hierarchy had surrendered its aim of gaining for the Church a prominent and independent place in national life. When a Catholic publicist, Stanislaw Stomma, suggested that Catholics could give way in matters of secondary importance (as for example, in social questions) while preserving an unyielding attitude on religious and moral matters, the advice was rejected by a spokesman for the episcopate. Father Piwowarczyk, editorial writer for *Tygodnik Powszechny*, answered that Catholicism is equally concerned with man's relation to God and to society. It would be "suicide" for Catholics if, to placate a stronger adversary, they did not insist upon religious education, the sanctity of marriage, human rights, and private property as the foundation of social and political institutions.<sup>8</sup>

The episcopate gave formal expression to its demands in the Catholic Constitutional Postulates, a document delivered to Premier Cyrankiewicz on March 17, 1947, for consideration in the newly elected Sejm that was to serve as a Constituent Assembly. The undisguised purpose of the Postulates was to save Poland from totalitarianism. "The state," in the words of the preamble, "is not the arbiter of morality, not the sole source of law, nor an end unto itself. . . ." The various clauses required that the Constitution safeguard all the traditional liberties of the individual, place limits upon the bureaucracy, guarantee private property and economic initiative. As for ecclesiastical matters, the bishops demanded acknowledgment of the Church's autonomy under a government of its own laws and its responsibility to God alone. In addition they asked for the recognition of the Church's rights to establish and

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, April 20, 1947.

to administer schools, charitable organizations, publishing establishments, and newspapers.<sup>9</sup>

Public and private morality, the Postulates maintained, would improve greatly to the benefit of the state if the Church could exercise its influence without hindrance. In the following months the Church gave substance to this contention by conducting a strenuous campaign against widespread alcoholism, hooliganism, the practice of abortion, and by urging the war-demoralized youth to settle down to constructive work. Also, the Church took steps to abate political strife. Even though the faithful were urged in pastoral letters to resist the "rampant spirit of materialism," they were also advised to "respect the goodwill of those persons in the materialist ranks who sincerely work for a better tomorrow for the working classes," and to desist from underground resistance.<sup>10</sup>

But these moves failed to improve relations between Church and State. During the two years following the elections the Communists were too busy eliminating the remnants of political opposition and revamping cultural and administrative institutions to devote full attention to Church affairs. Anti-papal attacks continued in the government-controlled press. But increasingly the Polish hierarchy and clergy were charged with non-cooperation, and this was represented as bordering on treason.<sup>11</sup> The government scored heavily in this campaign when in March, 1948, the Pope sent a letter to West German Catholics commiserating with the expellées. The propaganda machine did not miss the opportunity to present the letter as papal approval of German revisionism and as definitive proof that for political reasons the Vatican refused to provide a permanent church administration in the Oder-Neisse territories. The impact these charges must have had on the popular mind can be gauged from the response in episcopal circles. *Tygodnik Powszechny* conceded that the Holy See seemed to be better informed about German than about Polish affairs.<sup>12</sup>

While undermining the authority of the Church leaders, the government took care not to alienate Catholic opinion to the point where the program of sovietization might be impeded. For ex-

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in *The New York Times*, May 24, 1948.

<sup>11</sup> During a political trial in December, 1947, the names of two high Church officials were for the first time connected with the underground.

<sup>12</sup> *Tygodnik Powszechny*, June 6, 1948.



ample, during the summer of 1948, when a youth organization, Związek Młodzieży Polskiej, fashioned after the Russian Komsomol, was being set up, President Bierut tried to assuage Catholic fears with assurance that the government did not seek to place the young under its exclusive influence and control. Similar assurances accompanied the re-organization of the school and university system: no one philosophical viewpoint was going to be enforced.

Meanwhile the Church's legal status remained unsettled. In 1947 the regime made several attempts through the Social Catholics to establish relations with the Vatican. But since the government sought to extract the maximum in concessions—*de jure* recognition and a permanent ecclesiastical administration in the Oder-Neisse territories—without granting anything substantial in return, these efforts met with no success. The Pope refused to see the envoys on the ground that he could not discuss the renewal of the Concordat until the Polish government had settled its outstanding differences with the Polish Church. And in Poland Church-State relations were at a deadlock. The regime was unwilling to give serious consideration to the Catholic Constitutional Postulates; the Church was equally unwilling to forego constitutional guarantees for its administrative autonomy and educational mission.

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Toward the close of 1948 events put an end to the deadlock. The Polish Primate, Cardinal Hlond, died on October 2, 1948. His opposition to Communism had been intransigent and his policy in seeking concessions had been unbending. Wyszynski, his successor, was a younger man who in prewar days had written much on social problems and had belonged to circles which had striven to adapt the Church to modern conditions.

Simultaneously with the change in the leadership of the Polish Church, the regime consolidated its position. In December, 1948, the Communist and Socialist parties merged into the United Workers' Party and this marked the elimination of a major source of organized opposition. The Church now stood alone, blocking the way to complete sovietization. As could be expected, the Communists adopted a firmer policy, for at the unification congress the earlier pledge to acknowledge in the Constitution the Church's

special position was scrapped and the separation of Church and State was promulgated as the party slogan.

The Church's reaction to the new slogan was surprisingly temperate. Separation, the episcopal organ pointed out, did not make an ideal solution; nevertheless, the Church could accept it, provided that the separation worked reciprocally. To assure non-interference on both sides, the Church needed a firm guarantee of its autonomy; that is, full freedom to conduct its mission in churches, in schools and welfare organizations, and in its press.<sup>13</sup>

This essentially conciliatory response to a proposal which in the first postwar years had been considered decidedly unacceptable, was followed by a visit from Msgr. Sigismund Choromanski, secretary of the episcopate, to the Minister of Public Administration, Wladyslaw Wolski. After the conference, on March 20, 1949, Wolski made public an eight-point declaration enumerating the conditions on which the state sought agreement with the Church. The tone of the declaration was not very encouraging, for it was largely given over to denouncing the treasonable activity of the clergy and of the Vatican. As a prerequisite to any agreement the government expected a fundamental change of heart among the clergy toward the People's Republic: negotiations must be conducted in a spirit of complete loyalty. Specifically, the government demanded a settlement of the church administration for the Oder-Neisse territory; it promised not to do away with religious instruction in schools and not to interfere in the internal affairs of the Church so long as the civil laws were not violated and freedom of conscience was not abused for political purposes. The declaration also contained the disquieting announcement that the final settlement of Church-State relations in the proposed constitution depended wholly on the Church's good behavior.<sup>14</sup>

The episcopate replied with its own list of complaints but did not indicate that it believed the existing difficulties to be insoluble. The Bishops were ready to discuss the internal affairs of the Polish Church. Matters affecting church organization—that is, bishoprics in the Western territories—were beyond their competence and had to be settled with the Vatican directly. As to the

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, January 28, 1949.

<sup>14</sup> *Trybuna Ludu*, March 20, 1949.

spirit in which the negotiations were to be conducted, the bishops asked for an atmosphere of "peace and mutual trust."<sup>15</sup>

Anything but peace and mutual trust prevailed during the formal negotiations that began in July, 1949. For the next ten months the government used all the means in its power to force the Church leaders into submission. Vilification of the clergy was stepped up in the press. Charges of collaboration with the Nazis, of espionage, bribery and immorality alternated with accusations of a clerical alliance with reactionary elements at home and with imperialist forces abroad. This campaign was aided by the emergence of a small group of priests who, without breaking with the hierarchy, publicly indicated their opposition to episcopal policy and their desire to reach an agreement with the state on the government's terms. Furthermore, a series of decrees crippled the Church. On August 4, 1949, a decree on Freedom of Conscience and Religion, safeguarding religious as well as anti-religious activity, was promulgated. On September 21, 1949, Church hospitals were nationalized under the Ministry of Health. The Church welfare organization, Caritas, was taken over on January 23, 1950, by the government and placed under trusteeship control amidst a campaign of extraordinary intensity charging the hierarchy with the mismanagement of large sums and the administration of charity for political purposes. On March 20, 1950, Church lands, with the exception of the small acreage farmed by the parish priests, were confiscated.<sup>16</sup>

In spite of the government's decrees, mass meetings, and propaganda, the Church was not intimidated during the months of negotiations. On the contrary, it resisted the regime in every way it could. The episcopal letters of the period urged Catholics to remain true to the Church and its leaders, to ignore the attacks on the clergy printed in the press, to insist on religious education for their children, and to avoid participating in atheistic programs. Protests against illegitimate pressure were also made to the government directly. In a letter to President Bierut (February 16, 1950) the episcopate cited instances of "violence" and "fraud" to back its assertions that religious freedom was non-existent, that a "war against God" was taking place, and that the bishops were

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<sup>15</sup> *Tygodnik Powszechny*, April 10, 1949.

<sup>16</sup> The Church lost some 375,000 acres.

being terrorized into concluding an agreement. Objection was taken to the government's efforts to split the lower clergy and the hierarchy. Minister Wolski's attempt to induce the clergy to disregard the current negotiations and to enter into "a concordat on a lower level" was especially condemned.<sup>17</sup>

In this atmosphere a nineteen point Agreement was finally concluded on April 14, 1950. At the time it was believed that the Church had managed to salvage its spiritual autonomy by granting no recognition to the prevailing politico-economic system through a refusal to have phrases like "people's democracy" and "socialist reconstruction" used in the document and by getting the regime to acknowledge the spiritual authority of the Pope. But it seems highly doubtful that non-involvement in socialist politics or economics could be maintained when the Church undertook to oppose "the exploitation of religious feelings for anti-state activities," to teach the faithful respect for the state, to adhere to the foreign policy of the government, to request the Vatican for permanent bishoprics for the Oder-Neisse lands, to promote national reconstruction, and to refrain from opposing collectivization.

Likewise, it was believed that the Church had secured administrative autonomy through the government's guarantees: to safeguard freedom of worship; to retain religious instruction in schools; to permit a Catholic press, educational institutions (including the Lublin University), welfare organizations, religious orders and associations; and to allow the ministration of religion in the army, hospitals, and prisons. However, the spirit in which these guarantees would be carried out could well be questioned since all schools were under the control of the state educational system, associations were not free, and the Catholic charities had been greatly curtailed after the forced re-organization of Caritas.

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The conclusion of the Agreement did not result in peaceful co-existence. It soon became apparent that each side gave a different interpretation to its clauses. In the ensuing conflict, which lasted until September, 1953, the regime took the inflexible stand that harmony would not prevail until its own interpretation of the document was accepted.

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<sup>17</sup> Text in B. Wierzbianski, ed., *White Paper on the Persecution of the Church in Poland* (London, n.d.), pp. 34-41.

The episcopate believed that by signing a bilateral agreement it had successfully avoided becoming a "bought sect." In a letter to the faithful the episcopate interpreted its mission and obligation under the April Agreement as follows:

The Church on its side strengthens in the faithful the respect for law and authority, encourages enduring work in the reconstruction of the country. Proclaiming the principles of Catholic social morality, it contributes greatly to the establishment of the spirit of Christian community and justice for the general good of all. And through its teaching, the Church strengthens among the people respect for human life, obedience, order and harmony.<sup>18</sup>

Clearly, the Church felt that it could serve best by making the moral character of the people strong.

The episcopate carried out the specific points of the Agreement in good faith and in a manner appropriate to an ecclesiastical organization. On the matter of the Oder-Neisse lands, the Polish hierarchy tried to induce the Holy See to create permanent bishoprics. In a memorandum of October, 1950, and again during the visit to Rome of Cardinal Wyszynski in April, 1951, it was argued that these once Lutheran lands were being regained for Catholicism. But when the Vatican offered to appoint only titular bishops, the regime turned this down as not sufficiently permanent a solution. At home the Church actively worked to create a flourishing church organization so as to bind the new territories more firmly to the rest of Poland. To prove that the Church wholeheartedly supported Poland's claim to the western territories, priests joined in the numerous congresses and proclamations. Their pronouncements, however, did not have the tone of extreme invective and national antagonism so characteristic of the regime-sponsored resolutions. Church spokesmen stressed Poland's historical claim as well as the moral right to compensation for losses suffered during the last war.

As for endorsing the nation's economy and politics, the Church leaders pursued a more cautious policy. There was no hesitation in using ecclesiastical authority to support anything that served national welfare. But care was taken not to become identified with the socialist economic or political system. Thus the episcopate stinted no efforts to back economic undertakings; but its declara-

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted in *Kultura* (Special Issue no. 5), July 1953, p. 22.

tions always stressed the need to reconstruct the country and never called on Catholics to build socialism.

In politics the bishops were scrupulously neutral. Conspiracy against the state was always unequivocally condemned and the clergy was sternly reminded of canonical penalties for joining subversive groups. Priests were enjoined to keep strictly to ecclesiastical work. They were to instill in the faithful a sense of civic duty and public morality and were to avoid political involvements of any kind. In a message commemorating the first anniversary of the Agreement, the episcopate reminded the clergy "to avoid political disputes" and "to serve all citizens regardless of their political leanings."<sup>19</sup>

But the regime was not interested in the Church's measures to perfect the private or public behavior of the individual. In its interpretation of the Agreement, the regime fully expected the Church to join in the popularization and enforcement of official policies, and this became clear in a matter of weeks. In June, 1950, difficulties arose over the Stockholm Peace Appeal. The government expected the clergy not only to sign the appeal but also to become co-activists with the Communists at the mass meetings of the peace campaign. As these expectations did not materialize, a breach of the Agreement was charged. When, on June 22, the episcopate issued a pronouncement on the Defence of Peace, indicating its approval of the Appeal as a peaceful contribution to international affairs and condemning the destructive use of atomic energy, the brevity and the general tone of the statement were severely criticized. Furthermore, the government arrested several priests who had openly refused to sign the Stockholm resolution and dismissed some five hundred priests from teaching posts for the same offense.

The next point of the Agreement which the regime chose to enforce in its own version was the church administration in the western territories. Misquoting the terms (which stated that the episcopate would "request" the Vatican for a change), the regime claimed that the hierarchy had undertaken to liquidate the temporary administration and attacked the Church for doing nothing about it. On October 23, the newly created Office of Denominational Affairs served notice on the Bishops, demanding an end to

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<sup>19</sup> *News from Behind the Iron Curtain*, May 1-13, 1951, p. 24.

the temporary administration. When this demand, backed by well-organized mass protests, did not produce the desired effect, the regime proceeded unilaterally to "fulfill the will of the people." On January 26, 1951, the temporary apostolic administrators were removed and the local Church authorities ordered to elect permanent vicars. But this move failed to disrupt the Church's unity, for the vicars elected on January 29, declared their loyalty to the Vatican and to the Polish episcopate and requested recognition, which was promptly granted.

In educational matters the Agreement did not work any better. Even though the government had undertaken not to "limit the present status of religious instruction in schools" and to treat religious instructors on an equal footing with other teachers, the contrary became the rule. True, no decree limiting religious instruction was passed. Instead the regime resorted to all sorts of subterfuges aimed at eliminating such instruction from schools and confining it to the churches. In some schools instructors of religion were dismissed upon the slightest provocation and not replaced; in others the teaching of religion was discontinued upon the "demand" of the parents. Teachers of religion were not admitted to the professional organization, the League of Polish Teachers, and consequently were deprived of many professional privileges. Moreover, the regime gave strong support to the Society of Children's Friends which establishes schools based on outright atheistic tenets. As the number of private Catholic schools steadily diminished, those founded by the Society flourished.

The Catholic press labored under increasingly heavy censorship. *Tygodnik Powszechny*, which since 1945 had voiced independent Catholic views on current political, economic, and social problems, was by 1951 forced to limit its commentary to literary criticism and travel reports. A year later it was ordered off the newsstands and could only be obtained by direct subscription. Then, in March, 1953, it was suspended altogether. When it reappeared in July under a new editorial board composed of pro-regime Catholics, its contents reflected the change. In all, the five hundred and sixteen Catholic publications of 1947 had been reduced to forty-five by 1953.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Vladimir Gsovski, ed., *Church and State Behind the Iron Curtain* (New York, 1955), p. 205.

While taking these steps to force one-sided "co-operation" on the Church, the government did not fail to encourage the slowly growing numbers of its Catholic supporters. In the fall of 1950 a Clerical Commission was formed under the Association of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy, and also a lay Committee of Catholic Intellectuals and Leaders under the Committee of the Defenders of Peace. The purpose of these two groups was to mobilize the clergy against the Church hierarchy and to marshal Catholic laymen behind the various programs of the regime.

In October, 1950, the Church leaders began to point out in letters to President Bierut the numerous breaches of the April Agreement, saying that the document placed obligations on both sides. Again, at a meeting of Catholic newspaper editors and publishers in October, 1951, a spokesman for *Tygodnik Powszechny* indicated that the Church would be more willing to participate in the peace campaign if the April Agreement were honored by the other contracting party. Needless to say, this overture brought nothing but invective.

After the repeated violations of the Agreement there was but one hope left to the episcopate. The expectation was that the bilateral nature of the Agreement might pave the way for a separate recognition of the Catholic Church and its special rights in the new Constitution. In public discussions of the proposed Constitution during the early months of 1952, the Church authorities made it clear that Article 70, guaranteeing freedom of conscience and religion to all citizens and proclaiming the separation of Church and state,

did not cover the whole matter [and] could not be considered a solution for the highly complex and important problem of Catholicism in Poland. . . . Our attitude in this matter is clear and simple. We stand by the Agreement of April 14, 1950. . . . We prize the Agreement highly and it is our desire that it should become a permanent basis governing relations between Church and state in Poland. It is also our desire that the Constitution should not weaken, but, on the contrary, should strengthen this state of affairs.<sup>21</sup>

The episcopal comment was attacked viciously in the press and completely ignored by the Constituent Assembly. The new Constitution, enacted on July 22, 1952, established separation of

<sup>21</sup> *Tygodnik Powszechny*, March 16, 1952.



Church and State, with the proviso that "the principles of the relationship between Church and state, as well as the legal and patrimonial position of religious bodies, are determined by laws." Thus the Church was made subject to government decree; its relation to the State was to be regulated unilaterally by the State and not by way of agreement either with the episcopate or the Vatican. This was borne out by the February 9, 1953, decree which made all church appointments, promotions, and transfers subject to government consent.

Following the February decree—a clear violation of the Constitutional provision for the separation of Church and State—the episcopate realized that the attempt at co-existence was an utter failure, and acknowledged as much in a letter in May to President Bierut.<sup>22</sup> Unlike previous letters, this one was not limited to protests or an enumeration of violations but stated the bishops' conviction that the nature of Communism was responsible for the failure of the Agreement and made real co-existence impossible.

This episcopal letter marks the end of the second period in Church-State relations in postwar Poland. Unable to regain its prewar eminence, the Church had attempted co-existence. Now, the letter made it plain that the episcopate saw no chance for the Catholic Church to function autonomously in the People's Poland.

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But the acknowledgment of failure did not involve submission. On the contrary, the bishops stated that the Church had reached the limit of possible concessions. Further pressure was now applied to create "favorable" Church-State relations. In the months before and after the letter such resolute action was taken that the regime at last began to have success in its campaign against the Church. In December, 1952, five highly placed members of the Cracow Curia were arrested on charges of directing espionage, possessing foreign currency, and engaging in political subversion. Their trial was publicized as evidence of sabotage in the highest ecclesiastical circles. Accompanied by mass protests, the trial had served as a convenient prelude to the February decree on Church appointments. Many arrests—especially among the higher clergy—followed. On September 13, the arrest of Bishop Kaczmarek

<sup>22</sup> Text of this letter (May 8, 1953) appears in the *White Paper on the Persecution of the Church in Poland*, pp. 50-73.

of Kielce was made public. (Actually he had been arrested two years previously.) On the following day the first postwar trial of a bishop was staged. The public prosecutor labored to prove that Bishop Kaczmarek in his activities, which allegedly included espionage for the United States, war-time co-operation with the Nazis, and sabotage of internal policies, was merely carrying out the policies of the Polish episcopate and the Vatican. On September 22, Bishop Kaczmarek, having confessed to all the charges, was sentenced to twelve years' imprisonment. Three days later in Warsaw Cardinal Wyszyński preached a sermon in which he carefully refrained from polemics but nonetheless referred clearly to the recent events. What mattered in these "troubled" times, the Primate said, was the "inner truth" inaccessible to anyone from without, including experts in "official investigation."<sup>23</sup> The regime reacted quickly to this defiant comment. On September 28, it was announced that the Cardinal, charged with violating the Agreement, had been removed from his post and allowed to retire to a monastery.

Deprived of its head, the episcopate was forced into an abject promise to follow the regime's interpretation of the terms of the Agreement. After the Primate's suspension, consultations had immediately taken place between Bierut and Msgr. Klepacz, the newly appointed chairman of the episcopate. According to official reports, the bishops were showing "full understanding of the necessity of a change of heart toward the government."<sup>24</sup> The measure of change which the episcopate found wise to adopt is illustrated by the statement issued at the conclusion of the consultations. The bishops took it upon themselves "not to permit in the future any distortion of the content and the intentions of the April, 1950, Agreement and to create conditions favorable for the normalization of relations between Church and State."<sup>25</sup>

This declaration marked the end of the hierarchy's open resistance to the inroads of the government, for on December 17, 1953, all bishops took a loyalty oath in the office of the Council of Ministers. But since passive resistance could not be overcome, in subsequent months the job of placing religion in the service of the regime was entrusted to others. Already in October the two

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in *The London Times*, September 29, 1953.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, October 3, 1953.

<sup>25</sup> *Tygodnik Powszechny*, October 4, 1953.

uncoordinated Commissions, set up in the fall of 1950, had been merged into a single Commission of Lay and Clerical Catholics under the All-Polish Committee of the National Front. The task of adapting Catholicism to the demands of socialism was assigned to this new body. All that remained for the episcopate was to lend its support through occasional proclamations to the programs launched by the pro-regime Catholics.

Once the independent voice of the hierarchy was silenced, systematic work was undertaken on the revision of Catholic ethics and on the training of new Catholic cadres. The aim was to put an end to the "inner emigration" of which the majority of Catholics is guilty in the eyes of the regime. The government-controlled publishing house, Pax, puts out books tracing the affinity between Catholic dogma and Marxism. Especially prominent are works proving that the social encyclicals give blessing to the economic and social reforms now being introduced in Poland. In the spring of 1954 Pax began the serial publication of sermons to ensure acceptable preaching. As is to be expected, these sermons stress that the concept of Christian love involves social duty and economic effort.

Catholic institutions of higher learning were also placed under close supervision. In December 1954, a new Academy of Roman Catholic Theology, headed by a prominent pro-regime priest, Father Czuj, was opened in Warsaw. Hailed as a sign of the government's solicitude for religious life, it was actually a move to extend control over the teaching of theology, since the Academy replaced the theological faculties of the Cracow and Warsaw Universities. The work of the Catholic University in Lublin was curtailed. By 1955-56 only the faculties of philosophy and the humanities remained out of the original five. In 1952-53, the faculty of Law and Social Sciences was abolished; then the department of Christian philosophy became merely that of philosophy and it was stipulated that materialist philosophy must also be taught. Finally, in 1955-56, the faculties of theology and canon law were discontinued.<sup>26</sup> Some church seminaries still remain (twenty out of the original ninety), but a campaign is being conducted to "introduce fresh air" into their classrooms, that is, to have instruction in Marxism.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *The Tablet* (London), October 8, 1955.

<sup>27</sup> *Tygodnik Powszechny*, November 28, 1954.

The regime uses the supporters it gains among the laymen and priests in many ways. These range from having the parish priests join in the collectivization drive, to having "progressive" Catholic leaders partake in and celebrate the various Communist causes. Their voices add authority to the numerous undertakings on the home front, thus giving substance to the widely propagandized myth that a united nation backs the regime.

On the international front Catholic supporters are also most useful. They add weight to the peace pronouncements and gatherings by stressing the Christian aspect of the peace campaign; they endorse Soviet international proposals (for example, Molotov's European security plan) as the only salvation for mankind; both at home and abroad they publicize the danger of German revisionism through numerous public letters to Catholic intellectuals and clergy in Western Europe; and they charge that the Vatican is politically allied with the camp of reaction.

But despite the relative success in building up its control apparatus the regime has had no comparable achievement in winning over the masses to its "progressive" version of Catholicism. This can be seen both from the observations of Western visitors and from the admission of failure by the "progressive" activists.

Gunnar D. Kumlien witnessed in the summer of 1955 the mass pilgrimages to Czestochowa occasioned by the 300th anniversary of the Swedish siege. As he watched the 200,000 pilgrims participating with "utter dedication," he realized that the celebrations at the shrine—"a symbol of Poland's eternal struggle against its non-Catholic neighbors"—were nothing more or less than "a single flaming protest against the present."<sup>28</sup> Similar large attendance in church was observed by Kumlien among the industrial workers in Polish Silesia.

Celebrations of the 10th anniversary of the founding of the "progressive" Catholic movement did not draw the same crowds as do the traditional observances. Despite careful preparations, much pressure and publicity only some 7,000 priests and laymen participated in the commemorative activities during the fall of 1955. In point of numbers the biggest success was the Danzig celebration which, however, was connected with the opening of the reconstructed cathedral. The organizers of these events did

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<sup>28</sup> *The Commonwealth*, September 16, 1955.

not conceal their disappointment at the lack of response and attributed it to the widespread influence of "conservative elements."<sup>29</sup>

The inconclusive nature of the present situation where the State wields the outward controls while the Church retains its spiritual authority can be deduced from the fact that the regime still seeks a *rapprochement* with the Vatican.<sup>30</sup> But this sign of weakness should not be overestimated. For while Premier Cyrankiewicz finds it necessary to hint at a possible release of Cardinal Wyszynski, he still has the power to make it plain that the Cardinal will not be permitted to resume his official position. To quote Cyrankiewicz's words: "People who would like to undermine the foundations of our state will always be forced by us to express their views privately and not in official posts."<sup>31</sup>

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In spite of the regime's failure to win over the Catholic populace, many Western observers argue that eventually a national church will be established in Poland because of the wide publicity and official support received by the "progressive" Catholics and their ventures. However, evidence seems to indicate that the "progressive" Catholics are aiming at something of much wider purport than the establishment of a national church. Without question the regime has succeeded in silencing the bishops and in isolating the faithful from Catholic leadership abroad. Nevertheless, this goal, for which the regime had worked eight years, was achieved without a separation from Rome. And, interestingly enough, the men who cooperated with the government to reduce the Church to its present status are the ones to deny most insistently the possibility of a break with the Vatican on spiritual matters.<sup>32</sup> They condemn the rumors about the establishment of a national church as fabrications of hostile propaganda which seek to discredit the changes that have taken place in Poland, and warn their followers not to challenge or tamper with dogma. Why are such pains taken to maintain orthodoxy and to forestall the possibility of a break?

<sup>29</sup> *Dzis i Jutro*, December 4, 1955.

<sup>30</sup> In September 1955, the government tried to re-establish contact with the Vatican through Hugo Hanke, a former London Exile Government official who had just switched his allegiance. *The London Times*, September 14, 1955.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, September 16, 1955.

<sup>32</sup> This, in spite of the fact that in June, 1955, the Holy Office condemned Piasecki's chief books as well as his weekly journal *Dzis i Jutro*. *The Tablet*, July 9, 1955.

For one, it would make the task of the "progressive" Catholics even more unpopular at home. But another aspect seems to be equally important. A break with the Vatican would cut short their announced ambitions to align Catholics all over the world on the side of "progress."

The pro-regime Catholics take great pains to convince people abroad that basically Catholicism and Marxism are not incompatible. According to their explanations, the enmity that many Catholics feel for Marxism is due not to any basic difference between the two philosophies but to the backward social and political views of the Western Catholics. The Polish spokesmen argue that in religion Catholics should distinguish between the eternal and the temporal. They want to wean the Western Europeans from identifying Catholic dogma with the forms of capitalistic life. "If the eternal mission of the Church is to be carried out, it must be conducted with regard for the historical moment and the direction of world development."<sup>33</sup> Only in the socialist countries of Eastern Europe can Catholicism find the proper conditions for its universal mission. In the West the meaning of that mission has become warped through being intimately bound up with imperialism, war, and reaction, the argument runs.

Considerable effort is made to spread these views abroad. In discussing their immediate goals pro-regime Catholics place much stress on maintaining contact with and influencing Western Catholics. *Dziś i Jutro* publishes large editions in French for free distribution among Catholics of Western Europe. A lively exchange is kept up with leftist groups; for example, with the group centered around the French magazine *Esprit*. Public letters are sent to French and German Catholic leaders urging them to keep doctrinal purity and congratulating them when this "purity" conforms to the Soviet line. Running argument is directed against the contentions of Western papers—for example, the *Frankfurter Hefte*—that the "progressive" Catholics in Poland are kowtowing to the State. Western Europeans are invited to attend various events sponsored by the pro-regime group. Although these occasions are used to propagandize the "progressive" version of Catholicism, they are accompanied by assertions of filial obedience to the Pope. Thus on November 2, 1955, the International Meeting of Catholics and

<sup>33</sup> *Tygodnik Powszechny*, December 27, 1953.

Christian leaders, convened in Warsaw to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the "progressive" movement and attended by some twenty Western Catholics, sent the following cable to Pius XII:

We, the Catholics of Europe and Asia, gathered in Warsaw to deliberate on the means of putting into action in this changing world the teachings of the Catholic Church concerning the difficult questions of peace and justice, ask Your Holiness for understanding and for a blessing of our endeavors. At the same time we stress our attachment to our Mother, the Church, and our filial obedience to Your Holiness.<sup>34</sup>

This self-assumed task of convincing Catholics both inside and outside of Poland that the Church's mission is quite compatible with socialism, as well as the care taken not to break with the Holy See, seems to indicate that the pro-regime Catholics have a much more ambitious aim than the establishment of a national church. Their hope seems to be to have Catholicism serve not only the Polish regime but also world revolution.

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<sup>34</sup> *Dzis i Jutro*, November 13, 1955.