



Churches and the Polish transformation

Churches have always been present in public life. Their presence is a direct consequence of their mission. In the most general terms it can be said that the basic aim of the churches has always been man – his good, and most of all his spiritual good.¹ However, the human being achieves this good in a concrete political, social, economic and cultural reality. It is this context that forms the real environment in which man functions. Thus, if the goal of the churches' mission is service for the spiritual good of man, then churches faithful to this mission cannot be indifferent to the different conditions in which man lives. This is where we find justification for the churches' active presence in public life, although it has nothing to do with involvement in matters of the economy, management of public life or participation in political activity, but with the assessment of the political, social, economic and cultural reality and preparing man for the task of creating a reality that would reflect the greatness and dignity of man.

In modern history of Poland the year 1989 will be remembered as a time of a great breakthrough. After the June elections the country experienced a dramatic transformation which affected many areas of public life. Churches today, and the Catholic Church in Poland in particular, take an active part in the political, social, economic and cultural changes taking place, i.e. in the improvement and, at the same time, the building of a new and democratic Polish Republic. This engagement stems from the positive attitude of churches towards the ongoing changes. We can thus say that "Polish" churches have participated in the transformation process since its very beginning. Indisputable proof of this is the fact that in 1989 the two negotiating sides invited representatives of the Catholic Church to witness the "round-table" talks. Thus the presence of the churches in the Polish transformation is obvious. The opinions we sometimes hear – that churches have not found a place in the new reality and have yet to find a place for themselves – are simply a misunderstanding.

Under the previous regime only the Catholic Church had a significant presence in public life. The presence of other churches was rather symbolic and focused around their own, typically religious matters. It would often

¹ John Paul II, Encyclical "Redemptor hominis", Polish text, Warszawa 1979, p. 14.

simply follow the principle of "peaceful coexistence" with the political regime of the times. The Catholic Church however played a particular role in this period, different from that of other churches and religious organizations. It actively took part in the fight for human rights, for respect of the dignity of the human person as a fully empowered member of society, for the preservation of national culture. It can be aptly said that the Catholic Church in that period played, apart from its religious role, the role of a political opposition. It also remained the only independent institution which provided shelter and support to various types of opposition movements and groups during those times. In that period in Poland the Catholic Church also played an essential role in the shaping of a civic society, in the establishment of independent political institutions, both through its social teachings as well as concrete forms of actions.

In what form does the participation of churches in the transformation process express itself in Poland today?

In the most general of terms we can analyse it from two points of view – its teachings and actions taken. We need to add that in these respects the Catholic Church plays a primary role, decisively surpassing that of other churches and religious organisations. Having said this does not mean that we can negate the presence of other churches in the reality of Poland.

1. Teaching as a form of active participation of churches in the Polish transformation processes

The first form of the real and active presence of churches in the transformation processes in Poland is their social teaching, in the widest sense of the meaning. All churches have their notable contribution in this field, although the role of the Catholic Church has been the most prominent. Here we touch upon the essence of the social teachings of the churches that cannot be in any way considered a sort of by-product of their actual concerns, some new concept evolved under the pressure of the social reality of the past one hundred and fifty years.² They form the actual area of the churches' interest as a set of theorems and tenets in the light of which one can and should seek practical solutions to man's place in the social, political and cultural structures, as well as the sense of the structures themselves. Thus they are theorems relevant to the fundamental ethical principles, which are essential for the functioning of modern-day life, and the indispensable context for man's attainment of his principal objective, his salvation.³ We can thus say that these are ethical teachings regarding political, social and cultural life. In Polish circumstances this

² J. Kondziela, *Osoba we wspólnocie*, Katowice 1987, p. 11.

³ Compare H. Skorowski, *Człowiek. Kultura. Świat*, Warszawa 2002, p. 178.

concerns a wide scope of social, political and cultural issues. Here are some examples to better illustrate this.

The process of transformation in Poland begun in 1989 has been taking place first of all at a political level. All "Polish" churches took a positive attitude towards political transformation. The Catholic Church, for instance, expressed its stand in the Communique from the 235th Plenary Conference of the Polish Episcopate.⁴ Such a position of the churches is absolutely understandable. The new political reality changed, for example, the nature of the state, which – by embracing the democratic system – provided real space where its citizens could genuinely live and pursue their interests. We can speak of a fully empowered society within the framework of the new structures of the state. These facts alone were reason enough for "Polish" churches to give their support to the changes taking place. Taking a positive stand does not, however, mean an uncritical one. While positive about the spirit of political change, the churches take an independent view on many issues. The expression of these views by the churches is in present Poland their qualitatively important contribution into the ongoing discussion on the issue of what Poland should aspire to. Particularly active on this issue is the Catholic Church.

The critical position of the Catholic Church concerns several issues. One of the major political issues is the question concerning the nature of the state itself, whether we are aiming for a religious, secular or neutral state. The Catholic Church, as declared by its bishops, unequivocally distances itself from attempts to establish a religious state. A clear stand on this issue was expressed in the Pastoral Letter of the Polish Bishops (26 August 1991) on the duties of Catholics regarding parliamentary elections.⁵ At the same time we need to stress the fact that the Catholic Church also distances itself from the concept of a secular or neutral state if these terms were really to hide an attempt to eliminate completely any mention of religion in public life. Acceptance of such a model of secularism or neutrality, in which everyone would have to act in public life as if they were non-believers, would lead to the favouring of an atheist or agnostic viewpoint as the only acceptable "creed" in the public sphere. Because, according to the Church, there is no neutral viewpoint, it cannot accept this idea. Instead, it seeks to assert itself in society in a way that does not alienate, offend nor hinder the ideas of others.

This view of the Catholic Church is shared today by all "Polish" churches. What form, then, should the state take in the opinion of the "Polish" churches? It cannot take the form of a religious state, but at the same time it cannot head towards a religiously indifferent one. The state should thus guarantee

⁴ Komunikat z 235 Konferencji Plenarnej Episkopatu Polski, 16-17 June 1989, *Wiadomości Archidiecezji Warszawskiej* 7-8/1989.

⁵ Pastoral Letter of the Polish Bishops on the duties of Catholics regarding Parliamentary Elections, Jasna Góra, 26 August 1991, *Wiadomości Archidiecezji Warszawskiej* 9/1991.

churches the possibility of realizing a religious element in public life. The aim is not a state that is indifferent to this notion, but one with a duty to provide a perspective in which faith is present, although it is not the state that is responsible for it. This is possible when we distinguish between neutrality in terms of worldview and in terms of axiology. The state should be neutral in its viewpoints, but should not be neutral towards the system of religious and moral values recognized by all of society or its majority.⁶

Another issue concerning the nature of the state brought up by the churches in Poland is the need to define the relationship between church and state. The churches recognize that in the new situation they need to normalize their relationship with the state in a different manner than this was done under the communist system. In this case, too, the "Polish" churches hold their own views on the matter. Representatives of the churches unanimously postulated that the relationship between the state and churches needs to be based on terms of mutual respect, sovereignty and independence as well as a healthy cooperation for the common good.⁷ At the same time, representatives of the churches rejected the notion of defining the relationship of state and church in terms of their separation, as such division can be interpreted in various ways. In our post-World-War-Two past the principle of separation of church and state in general terms led in practice to painful results.⁸ It came to mean separation of church from state but not of state from church. This interpretative manipulation allowed the state to interfere in church matters, and thus decide on the nomination of bishops, the appointment of church posts, removal of religious instruction from schools, clergy from the army, from charity work, prisons, hospitals, and so forth.⁹ In the opinion of "Polish" churches the idea of separation of church and state is a negative principle, whereas the constitutional regulation of the relationship between state and church should work for the betterment and fuller development of citizens in their quest for perfection and, thus, exercise their right to religion in the most positive sense.¹⁰ To achieve that goal it is not the separation but the cooperation of both institutions that is necessary.

These are but two issues regarding politics in a broad sense that found their way into the social teachings of the churches, and illustrate the churches' presence in Poland's transformation processes. And although today there

⁶ Compare W. Piwowarski, "Podstawowe wartości społeczeństwa polskiego", in *Religie i Kościoły w społeczeństwach postkomunistycznych*, ed. I. Borowik and A. Szyjewski, Kraków 1993, p. 29.

⁷ Stanowisko Konferencji Episkopatu Polski w sprawie założeń aksjologicznych nowej konstytucji, *Wiadomości Archidiecezji Warszawskiej* 3/1992.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ Compare J. Glemp, *Boskie i cesarskie*, Warszawa 1995, pp. 30-1.

¹⁰ Compare *ibidem*, p. 31.

are other similarly controversial and debatable political issues raised by the "Polish" churches, such as the understanding of democracy as a form of government, the two mentioned above convincingly illustrate the presence of churches in public life in Poland.

The processes of transformation begun after 1989 also took place at the social level. These changes, too, were looked upon by the churches with sympathy in the belief that they would contribute to the creation of an environment in which a community can and should in fact decide for themselves.¹¹ Acquiescence also in this case does not rule out criticism. The criticism applies to several issues on which the "Polish" churches have their own independent views. Also in this case the Catholic Church plays a leading role.

One such issue is the problem of human rights. In its teachings the Catholic Church points out that when we discuss human rights today, we need to ask ourselves what we mean by the term human rights, whether we use it in its original sense or do we have some new interpretation of the rights of man in mind. Thus, it is very important what meaning we apply to this term, the hierarchy of human rights, their irrefutability and the integrity of the fundamental human values on which these rights rest. In the Polish discussion the irrefutability of human rights was negated openly. As those rights were of human origin, their permanence was considered debatable in parliament. To give an example, the hierarchy of human rights was questioned in the debate over the right to have an abortion. The right of free choice, at the disposal of the woman, was given priority over the right of the child to life.¹² Another important social issue raised by the "Polish" churches was the problem of axiological premises of the new constitution;¹³ social tolerance;¹⁴ the vision of religious instruction in Polish schools;¹⁵ and Christian values in society.¹⁶

"Polish" churches have shown a positive attitude to economic transformations.¹⁷ These promised the return to the rules of economy that have been absent for so many years. They provided the conditions for authentic active involvement and personal engagement of the individual. A positive view in this matter, however, does not, as in the previous cases, mean lack of criti-

¹¹ Komunikat z 235 Konferencji Plenarnej Episkopatu Polski, 16-17 June 1989, *op. cit.*

¹² Słowo Biskupów z 264 Konferencji Plenarnej Episkopatu Polski, Warszawa 1993, p. 2 [mps].

¹³ Stanowisko Konferencji Episkopatu Polski w sprawie założeń aksjologicznych nowej konstytucji, "Wiadomości Archidiecezji Warszawskiej" 3/1992.

¹⁴ Orędzie biskupów polskich o potrzebie dialogu i tolerancji w warunkach budowy demokracji, Wigry, *Słowo - dziennik katolicki*, 20-22 października 1995 r.

¹⁵ Komunikat z 240 Konferencji Plenarnej Episkopatu Polski, Warszawa 1990 r. [mps].

¹⁶ List Pastorski Episkopatu Polski o II Wielkiej Nowennie przed rokiem 2000, Warszawa 1991 [mps].

¹⁷ Komunikat z 236 Konferencji Plenarnej Episkopatu Polski, *Wiadomości Archidiecezji Warszawskiej*, 7-8/1989.

cism on the part of the churches. Also in this case the Catholic Church has played a leading role. Its interest focuses mainly on the perception of market economy. The moment the proposed economic reform was possible to implement, the churches gave it their explicit support.¹⁸ The situation of the Polish economy in 1989 was viewed analogically to that in 1918 when Poland regained its independence.¹⁹ This then meant that economic reform required huge effort as its success would have great impact on the preservation of that independence lost so many years ago.²⁰

In the discussions on market economy Polish churches stressed the fact that free market rules were not enough. What is more, these rules tend to turn against man when moral obligations, which are more basic than the rules of economics, are forgotten.²¹ The significance of this is that also "the employer should never forget that the multiplication of profit for egoistic ends cannot form the basic principle of his activity, which should be for the common good of his Country and humanity".²² The state, for its part, should keep in mind, when setting down the rules of market play, that "competition cannot be unrestricted".²³ The process of political and economic transformation cannot proceed at the expense of man, but should benefit him.²⁴

Another important issue was that of securing social rights. This problem, too, was taken up in the teachings of the "Polish" churches. Attention was drawn to the fact that during the period of economic reform:

state authorities should nevertheless take all precautions so that the burdens and inconveniences borne by society are distributed fairly proportionately, taking into consideration the needs of the weakest and the poorest... Every person faced with the dramatic perspective of losing their job, income, means of living, has the right to expect effective assistance from state and social institutions.²⁵

Faced with the problem of impoverishment of several social groups, it is truly a must to organise effective help for them.²⁶ In hindsight, for example, Catholic bishops realised that the greatest mistake of the churches was insuf-

¹⁸ Słowo Prymasa Polski do wiernych Archidiecezji Gnieźnieńskiej i Warszawskiej na Święto Niepodległości, Warszawa, 11 November 1989 [mps], p. 2.

¹⁹ Compare *ibidem*, p. 2.

²⁰ Compare *ibidem*, p. 3.

²¹ Compare *ibidem*, p. 2.

²² List Episkopatu Polski o chrześcijańskim etosie pracy, Jasna Góra, 30 November 1990 [mps].

²³ Prymas Polski na Wielkanoc 1991 roku, *Wiadomości Archidiecezji Warszawskiej* 4-5/1991.

²⁴ Komunikat z 269 Konferencji Plenarnej Episkopatu Polski, Warszawa 1994. [mps].

²⁵ Compare *ibidem*.

²⁶ Compare "Słowo Prymasa Polski do wiernych Archidiecezji Gnieźnieńskiej i Warszawskiej na Święto Niepodległości", *op. cit.*, p. 2.

ficient action to protect the neediest.²⁷ Simultaneously they called attention to the fact that reforms are difficult to implement and can provoke understandable opposition from different social groups. This necessitates provision of social security to the neediest. With all this in mind they emphasised the need for pro-family policies to be drawn up by the state. At the present moment it is as if parents were being punished by the sudden deterioration in their standards of living for giving birth and bringing up their offspring. The situation is in no way improved by the equally low benefits for everybody, which do not consider the recipients' real needs or spirit. For years Poland has not had a positive, consequent and long-term family policy. And it does not seem to make a difference what the makeup of parliament, or the political background of the parties which currently hold office, is. The promotion of the Polish family, so badly needed, remains in the "silent zone", never entering the sphere of interest of any of the implemented economic and social policies.²⁸

The churches in Poland have often been accused of not providing sufficiently strong support for the economic reforms being implemented.²⁹ The available documents show this not to be true. It is a fact, however, that comments made on numerous occasions by representatives of the churches on the economy went unnoticed and most likely did not make sufficient impact on people's attitudes.

The attitude of churches in Poland towards changes in culture was also positive. This is not surprising. The new cultural reality was also to provide a favourable environment for the development of individual and group activity. Several positive steps had been taken to achieve this, such as the elimination of censorship, free access to all of national and world culture, popularisation of public means of communication, and so on.

In this case, the "Polish" churches voiced their own views regarding two contentious issues. The first referred to the issue of national values.

The churches in Poland, especially the Catholic Church, have always been deeply involved with the people. Considering Polish history this seems only natural. Rev. Czesław Bartnik is even convinced that "the Catholic Church cannot afford not to be a national Church, if it is not to become a mere abstraction, if it is to be alive, concrete, walking proudly the paths of human history".³⁰ It is the nation that contributes to the church its individual members

²⁷ Compare: "Kościół nie poniósł porażki". Rozmowa z ks. biskupem Tadeuszem Piersonkiem, *Biuletyn KAI*, 25 September 1993, p. 5.

²⁸ List Biskupów Polskich na Uroczystość Świętej Rodziny 1993 r., Jasna Góra, 25 November 1993, *Wiadomości Archidiecezji Warszawskiej* 12/1993.

²⁹ Compare R. Graczyk, "Rokita kontra Pieronek, czyli rozmowa wzorowa", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 19-20 June 1993.

³⁰ Cz. Bartnik, "Problematyka teologii narodu", in *Polska teologia narodu*, ed. Cz. Bartnik, Lublin 1986, p. 34.

and communities, its identity, language, history, tradition, experience. It is like a great mirror reflecting the image of the church.³¹ During the time of transformations the "Polish" churches, each with an intensity of their own but the Catholic Church in particular, stressed the need for the preservation of national identity. Speaking on the subject of European integrity, they repeatedly said that this process should not be achieved through the elimination of cultural diversity of nations on the continent, but the creation of a Europe of nations, where the values of each nation are to be respected.³² Often, in various statements made by the hierarchs of different Polish churches as well as the laity, the importance of not forfeiting our national values in the process of transformation was stressed. The bishops of the Catholic Church asked: "Doesn't Europe have the right to ask why it was Poland that began the bloodless battle for a new formation of man?"³³ And they answered that it was the maturity of their national culture that helped Poles survive the difficult years of partitions, German occupation and communism. And in recent years it culminated with the creation of the "Solidarity" movement which grew out of national consciousness and brought down a totalitarian communist system and the wall that divided Europe for 40 years.³⁴

"Polish" churches often declared their regard for national values, yet at the same time warned against elevating national identity to the rank of a false absolute. An example of concrete action in this respect and of particular significance for the Episcopate of the Catholic Church was the celebration of the 30th anniversary of Polish and German reconciliation.³⁵

Another issue taken up in the social teachings of the churches in Poland was the issue of returning to Europe. The changes begun in Poland after the year 1989 were being implemented under the grand banner of rejoining Europe. In this discussion the "Polish" churches, especially the Catholic Church, reminded everyone that when speaking of Europe it is important to think of it not so much in terms of a geographical entity, an economic or political structure, as of primarily a certain commonwealth of values and culture.³⁶ An assessment of the state of European culture is of fundamental importance for the understanding of the position of "Polish" churches, especially the Catholic Church, on nearly all controversial issues. The same applies to the question of the so-called return to Europe. The crux of the matter is that only a culture built on Christian values is worthy of the title of European.

³¹ Compare *ibidem*, pp. 36-7.

³² E. K. Czaczkowska, "Jedność dwóch płuc", *Rzeczpospolita*, 12 December 1995.

³³ List Pastorski Episkopatu Polski na niedzielę 30 czerwca 1991 [mps].

³⁴ Compare "Wspólne słowo polskich i niemieckich biskupów z okazji trzydziestej rocznicy wymiany listów (1965-1995)", *Spółeczeństwo*, 4/95, p. 857.

³⁵ Compare *ibidem*, pp. 855-65.

³⁶ Compare *ibidem*, p. 857.

The Decalogue, as we know, is the great root of European Christianity.³⁷ Rejection of this tradition would constitute a betrayal of Europe and a threat to her future:

If the religious and Christian foundations of this continent were marginalized in terms of their role as the source of ethical inspiration and of their influence on social relations, then not only would the whole historical heritage of Europe be negated, but a future worthy of a European citizen would also be threatened.³⁸

Europeanization – according to Polish Catholic bishops, for example – means “returning to Europe’s Christian roots”.³⁹ All negative experiences in European history, on the other hand, was the effect of departure from the Christian sources of European culture.⁴⁰ Our return to Europe is a return to a culture thus perceived.⁴¹

Summing up the above reflections it should be stressed that through their critical teachings churches in Poland actively participate, in the processes taking place. This critical attitude is a particular type of input of the churches into the ongoing changes and has the chance of coming to fruition in the form of a more mature answer to the question of the future shape of the country. Such participation allows ecclesiastical institutions to contribute in the discussion on the direction and shape of the country, ideologically and otherwise.

2. Action as a form of presence of churches in Polish transformation processes

The churches play a definite role in the Polish transformation not only through their teachings, but also through concrete action. This action is best illustrated by their charity work aimed at preventing negative effects of the Polish transformation processes from occurring. To better understand the quality of this engagement we need to look back in history.

It is common knowledge that after 1950 the churches in Poland were practically deprived of the possibility to organise charitable institutions, associations or unions, and most of the church property was requisitioned by the authorities of the time. As a result, all social and charitable work which formed

³⁷ Słowo Pasterskie Biskupów Polskich na Niedzielę Środków Społecznego Przekazu, 15 September 1991 [mps], p. 3.

³⁸ List Pasterski Episkopatu Polski na Tydzień Powszechnej Modlitwy o Jedność Chrześcijan od 18 do 25 stycznia 1989 r. [mps], p. 2.

³⁹ Słowo Pasterskie Biskupów Polskich na Niedzielę Środków Społecznego Przekazu, 15 September 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁴⁰ Compare J. Glemp, List pasterski prymasa Polski do kapłanów i wiernych archidiecezji warszawskiej z okazji dnia modlitwy o pokój, 27 August 1989 [mps], p. 3.

⁴¹ Komunikat z 239 Konferencji Plenarnej Episkopatu Polski, *op. cit.*

an essential part of the pastoral duties of the churches was out of necessity included in their general pastoral duties. The churches had no possibility whatsoever of organising any type of structures outside the parish, religious congregations and communities.

All “Polish” churches were given back this possibility during the period of transformation. The parliamentary Act of 17 May 1989 was of particular significance to the Catholic Church. It gave the Church, once again, the full freedom to act, including the involvement in charity work.⁴² This allowed the reestablishment in October 1990 of Caritas Polska – a pastoral charity institution of the Conference of the Episcopate of Poland and individual dioceses of Caritas. Caritas branches were also established in the Greco-Catholic rite, in field dioceses and in the Order of St. John of God. This fact is of fundamental importance for the understanding of the involvement of the Catholic Church in helping the country overcome the problems accompanying the transformation process in Poland. The Catholic Church in Poland thus entered a new phase of charity work, slowly surmounting various difficulties of an organizational, personnel and material nature. In religious congregations, parishes, and lay institutions and associations, new charity projects were initiated and old ones re-emerged.

The main entity through which the Catholic Church conducts its social work in Poland today is Caritas Polska and Caritas of individual dioceses. Caritas Polska is continually acquiring new experience in the organization and coordination of aid for the most needy. Their work takes the form of running nursing homes, accommodation for single mothers, night and other shelters, and soup kitchens for the homeless. An important part of their work focuses on solving problems, accompanying Polish transformation, which so often have the greatest impact on children. One of the ways Caritas responds to the plight of children trapped in this situation is by organising winter and summer camps, and entertainment for thousands of children from poorer families. Another important project is the Christmas Eve Children’s Assistance Effort and the so-called Easter Initiative that have been organized for the last few years. Another important part of charity work of Caritas Polska is relief work in the form of fund-raisers in the event of emergencies or natural disaster.⁴³

The most noticeable and at the same time most effective work of Caritas Polska is the work at the diocesan level. This is to be expected, as such Caritas centers are closer to their communities and thus better prepared to analyze community needs and effectively counteract and respond to social problems. A truly important achievement are their care centers. These play a crucial role in solving various problems of the local population. Their significant success

⁴² Compare *Materiały robocze Synodu*, Warszawa 1999, p. 13.

⁴³ Compare *ibidem*, pp. 14-5; A. Rak, “Znak błogosławieństwa w domach”, *Caritas. Kwartalnik poświęcony pomocy charytatywnej*, 4/1996, pp. 3-5.

is due to the fact that they work in a close relationship with the local authorities. The centers provide services to the whole local population, especially the elderly, sick, and the lonely – they have become a distinct presence on the Polish social scene.

Another service of diocesan Caritas are their daytime centers. Those staying in the centers have, apart from free medical and nursing care, access also to professional and specialist rehabilitation and therapeutic facilities. The centers also provide their users with a chance of meeting interesting people and pursuing their interests as well as receiving pastoral care.

The most beneficial and successful form of Caritas activity are the parish charity teams which have been transforming into the Caritas Parish Teams since 1990. On reflection it is easy to spot that for years in Poland it is the parish that has been a real carrier of charity work and remains such to this day.⁴⁴ Charity work seems to have always been an intrinsic part of the parish. This applies not only to Catholic parishes, but also to the religious communities of other churches. It is these communities that provide the “Polish” churches with the best knowledge of the real needs of the people, so that they can best respond to those needs. Today we can identify several fundamental areas in which social and charity work of these communities concentrates.

The poverty stricken in Poland become the premier potential “recipients” of social aid provided by these communities. The reason for this is that such aid, provided by state run centers, is insufficient. The first, to draw the attention of charity work provided by the churches through their communities, are those who are traditionally afflicted by poverty, and these are families with many children, the unemployed, single mothers, pensioners, the homeless and people with disabilities. Aid in these cases is usually provided on demand, as the need arises. It includes the distribution of food, clothes, and subsidised school lunches for children, organization of school breaks and summer camps for children from large families. This type of aid has already become a tradition in present day Poland.⁴⁵ The communities very often organize soup kitchens for the poor and provide special food vouchers for the purchase of food in stores. Many parishes and religious communities provide some financial aid. At times religious communities organize, if their means allow it, various types of medical, dentistry and even hairdresser services.⁴⁶

A significant, negative consequence of the Polish transformation is undoubtedly unemployment, a completely new phenomenon in Poland. The unemployed, too, has become the focus of charity work in its widest sense, of

⁴⁴ More on the subject: T. Kamiński, “Parafia wobec problemów społecznych”, *Chrześcijanin w świecie*, 2/1997, pp. 99-111.

⁴⁵ Compare *ibidem*, p. 104; M. Zych, “Jak pracuje nasz Parafialny Zespół Caritas”, *Caritas. Kwartalnik poświęcony pracy charytatywnej*, 4/1996, p. 13.

⁴⁶ Compare *ibidem*, p. 104.

the “Polish” churches. And because unemployment affects not only individual persons, but in effect their whole families, they too require assistance from the parish and religious communities. We need to point out that the unemployed receive much of the aid offered to the impoverished; thus charity work of the parish and communes is aimed at meeting their basic needs. Organisation of such aid is relatively easy, but does not solve the problem of unemployment itself. It is a known fact that such material aid provides only temporary relief, but even relatively large financial benefits cannot compensate for the psychological trauma resulting from unemployment. In practice this means the necessity of taking up other types of action for the benefit of the unemployed.⁴⁷ It is good to note the first signs of an increasing range of projects to help the unemployed, such as the creation of clubs for the unemployed where they can exchange experiences, find entertainment and get psychological therapy. The clubs are now also offering work placement services. In many cases they also offer a chance for pastoral services for the unemployed. This element and its importance also deserve recognition. It is an undeniable fact that unemployment carries with it the threat of moral degradation, especially when it afflicts the young. Pastoral projects focusing on these people are very important.⁴⁸ We also need to mention the fact that the communities of the “Polish” churches organize various forms of educational courses for the unemployed.

The negative effects of the ongoing changes afflict the younger generation as well. At issue is not only their growing material poverty, but also, or maybe first of all, the problem of finding their place in society. Often it is the case of young people being unable to adapt to new conditions created by the continuing changes. They too require the help of the parish and religious communities. Many of the parishes and religious communities today provide a wide range of services focused on the elderly. It is provided on two levels. The first deals with concrete material aid. The parishes and religious communities today are relatively well prepared in the provision of assistance in the form of distributing life essentials, help in acquiring such necessities, assisting in caring for hygiene, keeping accommodation clean and tidy, helping to obtain needed medication and medical equipment, and so on. The second refers to the spiritual needs of the elderly and the sick. This is providing pastoral services in their widest sense.⁴⁹

The churches in Poland actively respond to problems brought on by the ongoing changes by providing concrete help also to people with various addictions. In these cases as well, most of the social work takes place in Catholic parishes and religious communities of other churches. And because the most common addiction among Poles is alcoholism, much of the churches’ efforts

⁴⁷ Compare *ibidem*, pp. 105-106.

⁴⁸ Compare *ibidem*, p. 106.

⁴⁹ Compare H. Skorowski, *Człowiek. Kultura. Świat, op. cit.*, pp. 224-28.

focus on prevention at the level of their communities. The possibilities of counteracting this problem nowadays are relatively many and diversified. The most frequent form of help in these cases are the AA groups (Alcoholics Anonymous) formed at the initiative of members of parishes and religious communities. These groups play a very important role today in Poland. Interest in various therapy classes is also steadily rising. An important role is also played by prophylactic camps based on religious programs. There is an increase in the number of support groups for the families of alcoholics.⁵⁰

Apart from projects aimed at those who have already succumbed to the addiction, an important part of the program is alcoholism prevention. The preventive measures at their disposal are numerous. In many parishes and religious communities various detox brotherhoods are being formed, which have a rather long and rich tradition in Poland. Various initiatives are also taken up with the aim of promoting liquor-free celebrations and entertainment. There are whole systems in place to promote knowledge of and warning against the various negative aspects of alcoholism and similar addictions.⁵¹

Apart from efforts directed at fighting alcoholism and its effects, the Polish parishes and religious communities provide help to people with other addictions and weaknesses. Drug addiction draws particular attention of the churches today, and the local congregations try to tackle that problem in many ways. In this case, too, their actions are aimed, on the one hand, at helping those already addicted to drugs and, on the other, on preventing the further spread of this addiction.⁵²

I have just presented some of the ways the churches in Poland try to respond to the most pressing problems accompanying the transformation process in Poland. We need to be aware, however, that the problem essential to the functioning of the churches, which is the whole process of education in a system of and respect for values, has not been taken up here. It does represent the basic mission of the churches which is realised in various forms: meetings, religious instruction, the creation of various groups, and so forth. They are aimed not only at teaching the faithful, but at raising good citizens, as well. The activities of the churches signalled here illustrate their active presence in the public life of Poles.

⁵⁰ Compare *ibidem*, p. 227.

⁵¹ Compare *ibidem*, p. 227.

⁵² Compare *ibidem*, p. 228.

3. Final comments

The above comments and reflections can be summed up in a few basic points:

- a) The political, social, economic and cultural changes currently taking place in Poland bring about many positive and qualitatively important phenomena.
- b) These changes find acceptance in the Church. This fact does not however rule out critical assessment of the present situation. The Church, while accepting the changes at all the levels of their occurrence, looks critically on certain aspects of these changes. Its critical teachings are the first form of the Church's presence in the Polish transformation process.
- c) The Polish transformation process also discloses negative phenomena, such as: growing numbers of the poor and destitute, the problem of unemployment, homelessness, and various other abnormalities. The Polish Church not only actively participates in these changes, but is also actively involved in resolving the problems they create. Active participation is the second form of the Church's presence in the Polish transformation process.