

Poland: Dialogue between Church and State?

Mieczyslaw Rakowski, editor of the Polish weekly *Polityka*, published an article entitled "The Basis of Cooperation and Dialogue" (*Polityka* 25 March 1978) which provoked numerous reactions in the pro-government Polish religious press. Jerzy Turowicz, editor of *Tygodnik Powszechny*, the main Polish Catholic weekly recognized by the Church, tried to publish his response in his own paper, but the Office for Control of the Press banned it. His article, "Dialogue, Pluralism and Unity", eventually appeared in the Polish samizdat journal, *Spotkania* No. 5, January 1979. That such a prominent Catholic journalist and an official editor should decide to publish in *Spotkania* shows the growing importance of this journal within the life of the Polish Catholic Church.

Rakowski points out in his article that since Pope John XXIII the Roman Catholic Church has accepted that it must come to terms with socialism. Thus cooperation and dialogue between Church and State in Poland is now possible in certain "common spheres". Such good relations, however, are disrupted when the Church makes demands which are, in his view, unreasonable, such as asking for an end to atheist propaganda and for permission to spread the Christian faith.

Turowicz claims that ideological conflict between Church and State still exists. He approaches the question of dialogue and cooperation from a more fundamental level: Polish society needs to change basically before genuine dialogue between different ideologies is possible. A plurality of ideologies must be permitted, and free discussion as well as more personal liberty must be allowed. Only then would the way be open to national unity which is based on genuine dialogue rather than on an illusion of ideological uniformity.

DIALOGUE, PLURALISM AND UNITY

"There are no problems which cannot be discussed in our Party and in our society", said Edward Gierek in the paper from the Politburo of the KC PZPR which he read at the 2nd National PZPR Conference. One such problem which

deserves to be, and indeed must be, discussed is that of relations between the Roman Catholics and the Marxists in our country. Mieczyslaw F. Rakowski's recently published article "The Basis of Cooperation and Dialogue" (*Polityka*, 25 March 1978) is an appeal for discussion of this theme. This article touches on some very important and difficult problems which are seldom discussed - problems which closely concern everyone living in Poland. The author discusses these problems quite objectively and pragmatically, showing a deep concern for society. Mr Rakowski stresses that the views expressed are purely his own. Nevertheless, since he is the editor-in-chief of *Polityka*, it is reasonable to assume that many communists think as he does. In taking up Mr Rakowski's challenge, I too must stress that the views I express are purely my own; I have no mandate to speak either for the Church in Poland or for its hierarchy; I do believe, however, that I voice the opinions of many Catholics in our country.

Mr Rakowski sets his deliberations in the wide context of the changes which have taken place over the last few decades in the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the socialist States, and of the recent events which have had some bearing on church-state relations in Poland. As far as the international situation is concerned, my interpretation of these changes would perhaps differ somewhat from that of Mr Rakowski, but this does not merit arguing about here. It is certain that the Vatican's *Ostpolitik*, initiated by Pope John XXIII and consistently adhered to by Pope Paul VI, which is intended to improve the situation of the Church in the socialist countries and to help achieve international peace, has created a new relationship between the Church and the socialist world. Of greater relevance to our present subject, however, are the events directly connected with Poland, i.e. the meeting between the Primate of Poland, Cardinal Wyszyński and the First Secretary of the KC PZPR, Edward Gierek, which took place on 29 October last year [1977], and the visit paid by Edward Gierek to Pope Paul VI

in the Vatican on 1 December last year [1977]. These events were of great importance. The speeches made by Edward Gierk and Pope Paul VI in the Vatican, several other statements by Edward Gierk, in particular those made at the 2nd Party Conference and in the Sejm, and, on the part of the Church, several statements by the Polish bishops, in particular the Polish Primate's Epiphany homily in Warsaw (which we were able to publish in *Tygodnik Powszechny* on 12 February and which Mr Rakowski quite rightly considers to be very significant) testify to the change in the climate of church-state relations, which affords new prospects for fruitful dialogue and cooperation.

It is quite obvious, however, that verbal statements – whatever their significance – do not themselves change any situation. Before change can occur action must be taken, and certain conditions which would render cooperation possible must be fulfilled. These matters are by no means straightforward. Mieczysław Rakowski rightly reminds us that “in the past the Marxist movement as a whole was radically atheistic and waged war on the Church and on all religions. It assumed that all religious beliefs would soon disappear. Of course this attitude aroused mistrust of Marxism in the Catholic Church and led to confrontation”.

Elsewhere Rakowski writes that the Marxist camp “shelved its dogmatic and sectarian interpretation of socio-political relations a long time ago” and that “socialist ideology long ago rejected primitive atheism, the aim of which was war with God”.

Now even if one could doubt that the changes in the theory and especially in the practice of the Marxist camp are as far-reaching as Mr Rakowski claims, the fact remains that the ideological conflict between Catholicism and Marxism still exists. It is also a fact that over the last 30 years much has happened in the sphere of church-state relations which cannot be disregarded, and which makes the transition from confrontation to cooperation rather difficult. Besides, to quote Mr Rakowski once more, “clearly, a relationship between two parties... does not mean that either side has abandoned its ideological principles... it does not mean that the difference in

their views on the nature of the world has been eroded”.

The above does not mean, of course, that there have been no positive changes in the church-state relationship over the last few years. A very important factor here is the strengthening of ties between the Apostolic See and the Polish government, which has resulted in the formation – on both sides – of permanent groups for working contacts, and which led to Edward Gierk's visit to the Vatican.

Nor am I forgetting that normalization of church-state relations began a few years ago, a process which enabled solutions to be found for some contentious problems. Many problems remain, however, mainly owing to the different ways in which the Church and the State interpret the concept of normalization.

The changed nature of the present church-state relationship can be seen from the fact that the state authorities have appealed, in the interest of the nation, for the Church's cooperation. The Church, through its leader the Primate of Poland, has responded positively to this appeal. This cooperation springs from the concept of the moral and political unity of the nation, which has been very strongly emphasized by Edward Gierk and by Poland's other political leaders; and the concept of uniting all Poles in the struggle to achieve positive ends. Such unity was considered to be necessary if the country's social and economic difficulties were to be overcome. It is worth underlining the fact that in its statement made through the Front of National Unity, the State emphasized that “Socialist Poland has not forgotten the part played by the Roman Catholic Church in maintaining Poland's national values and cultural heritage. It values highly the Church's concern for the nation's problems and the vital participation of Catholics, and those of other denominations, in the overall development of the nation.” The participation expected from the Church would have to be primarily concerned with problems of social morality, i.e. with the bringing up of children, the strengthening of the family, the shaping of a positive attitude towards work etc.

If the Church responds positively to this appeal it is because, as the Front of National Unity rightly points out, it has

always had a deep concern for the welfare of the nation, and also because, in the opinion of the Church, activity directed at raising either the individual or the collective level of morality is one of its main duties, duties which it has always tried to carry out irrespective of the regime or the prevailing political conditions. However, if this activity is to be transformed into cooperation, or rather, if this cooperation is to be raised to a higher level, then certain conditions will have to be satisfied. These conditions have been formulated by the Primate of Poland in his homily, in which he made a number of demands of the state authorities – demands which have been made many times before by the church authorities.

The present situation is quite paradoxical: the communists used to treat the Roman Catholic Church as a political force, the activity of which opposed or hindered the development of socialism. As a result there was always a tendency, if not to eliminate the influence of the Church, then at least to limit it and to try to counteract it. There is no lack of evidence to show that this tendency still exists, albeit in a weaker form. Now, the Church cannot be expected to cooperate with a government which continues to fight against it. Moreover, the Church cannot agree to limitation either of the aims or of the means of its mission, it cannot consent to being treated as a *sui generis* voluntary (and regimented) stand-by corps to be called upon only in certain specified (although perhaps very important) cases, such as the battle against alcoholism.

It is vital that the place and the role of the Church in the life of the nation be recognized, especially in the case of a nation like Poland, which has been Christian for a thousand years, and where the vast majority of the population belongs to the Church. Clearly, the very existence and activity of this Church in a socialist State is a political fact, but this does not mean at all that the Church has political designs. In his homily the Primate of Poland reminds us of Christ's words: "My kingdom is not of this world." The Church does not feel called to change political systems. On the contrary, it considers that it has a right and a duty to exist and to carry out its mission under any regime. There

obtains in Poland the principle of separation of Church and State. There may be some who are opposed to it. It seems to me, however, that generally speaking the Roman Catholics in our country not only do not question this principle, but cannot even imagine any other basis for a relationship between Church and State in a socialist country. This principle may, however, be understood in different ways. One might expect separation of Church and State to mean that mutual respect, perhaps even friendship, exists between the two institutions and that neither interferes in the other's internal affairs. The principle of separation cannot, surely, mean that church activities should be restricted to religious worship and confined within the walls of the church building. It cannot mean that religion should be treated as a strictly private matter, without taking into consideration its connection with or its effect on the life of society. The aim of the Church is to lead people to salvation and this aim, which is eternal and not of this world, is being realized on earth through the work of educating people in the actual situation in which they find themselves. The Christian view of the world is based on religious faith and embraces the whole concept of man, the reason for his existence, his goals and his calling, his rights and duties. For this reason the Church must be, and indeed is, concerned with the conditions under which people live within certain civil, social, economic and political structures. This is why the Church demands that every social structure create the best possible conditions for full development of the personality; this is why it demands that people be able to live in peace, freedom and justice; this is why, when human rights are not respected, the Church so often protests. It is interesting to note that lately, in Latin America, it has been the Roman Catholic Church which has become the main social force fighting for justice and human rights. Today the Church fights for justice and freedom in all countries irrespective of their social structures. Although the Church's activity in this area is without doubt political, it should not be seen as interference in the internal affairs of the State or as an infringement of the principle of church-state separation. In such cases the Church

acts as an advocate of morality – morality which should be observed both in the social and in the political life of the community.

Starting with these assumptions it must be said that the missionary task of the Church in the present social and political situation is not only a matter of the Church's internal religious activity, such as catechizing, evangelizing, dispensing the sacraments, or doing acts of charity; it is also concerned with the participation of Catholics in the public and cultural life of our nation. There is no question here of demanding any privileges for the Church. Pope Paul VI made this clear in the speech he addressed to Edward Gierek, and our bishops have said the same on several occasions: the Church does not claim any privileges for itself. Rather, it asks for recognition of the rights which stem from both the historical and the present role of the Church and religion in the life and culture of our nation. These are not so much the rights of the Church as an institution as the rights of believing individuals, of those citizens of this State who profess a well-defined Christian faith, and who want to shape their future and that of their children in accordance with this faith, who want to contribute to and exert some influence on the future of their country and on its life and culture.

In reply to this one could give many examples to show that Catholics do live within the framework of the nation and its culture. This is true, but with the proviso that their influence is neither as widespread nor as far-reaching as that to which they may feel they are entitled. The Church is expected to exert a positive influence on young people and to raise their moral standards. It has to be pointed out, however, that there is not a single official Catholic youth organization in Poland; furthermore any unofficial organizations active among young people, even if they are of a purely religious nature, encounter numerous difficulties. A nation's culture – in the broadest sense of the word – is today the main instrument for shaping ideas and attitudes and the main vehicle for expressing public opinion. The Church, even when engaged in the strictly religious activity of evangelization, has the right, recognized by most countries,

to use the tools of culture, including the mass media. However, the organs of our country's "official" culture – television, radio and the national press – practically never mention religion or the Church. Catholics as Catholics have no access to the "official" structures and cultural centres controlled by the State. With regard to the separate, "private", Catholic sector of cultural activities, it should be noted that the number of books and periodicals published and the number of copies printed of each periodical in no way correspond to the requirements of the faithful. Are examples really necessary? We shall give you one, taken from our own experience. The weekly *Polityka*, brilliantly edited by Mr Rakowski in the spirit of Marxist ideology, prints 300,000 copies, whereas *Tygodnik Powszechny*, generally recognized as the leading Catholic publication in a country where the vast majority of the population is Catholic, prints 40,000 copies which cater for less than half of the demand. Our editorial staff receive letters every day from desperate readers who are unable to obtain their own copy of our paper.

No less serious than the quantitative restrictions are the qualitative restrictions imposed on publications. We have in mind here first of all the activities of the Office for Control of the Press, Publications and Performances. This Office has many times prevented Catholics and other independent thinkers from taking part in discussions on the most important problems affecting our country.

Mr Rakowski raises the question of the Church's attitude to atheism, demanding that Catholics, who ask to be treated with tolerance, should themselves behave tolerantly towards unbelievers. It seems to me that such an approach is based on a complete misunderstanding of the situation. There are very few Catholics in Poland who would deny that unbelievers have the right to spread their convictions. What the Church and Catholics find difficult to condone is the according of privileges to atheism to the detriment of religious belief. We are not referring here to the Society for the Propagation of Secular Culture, or to the influence of the weekly *Argumenty* and other similar publications. We are primarily concerned about the all-pervading presence of ideo-

logical attitudes in our culture – which we mentioned earlier – and about the ideological bias in education, which is without any doubt coloured by atheistic teaching.

Finally one very painful matter: the widespread discrimination against Catholics in many sectors of professional life, where holding Marxist views and especially belonging to the Party paves the way to success, a person's promotion and other privileges. On the other hand, open adherence to the Catholic faith and the practice of religion makes it difficult and often quite impossible to obtain promotion.

The advocates of socialism often appeal to us not to divide society into believers and unbelievers. They are quite right to make such an appeal, but the fact is that this division is made not by us, the believers, but by the discriminatory system, which often treats believers as second class citizens.

This is not a matter of privileges therefore, but of justice and equality. Mr Rakowski is quite justified in appealing, at the end of his article, to the whole nation, to Party members and non-Party members, believers and unbelievers, to play an active part in the country's production and social life. He writes: "Clearly active participation of this sort cannot be fitted into any and every scheme. It is the duty of the people's government to see that each individual has an equal opportunity of working both for his country and for himself."

The subject of this article, defined by the problems discussed in Mieczyslaw Rakowski's article, is the place and the role of Catholics in Poland today and the possibility of cooperation and dialogue between Church and State, between Catholics and Marxists. The real problem, however, is more complex and cannot be solved simply by state recognition of the Church's rights. Rather, the solution must be sought in the true democratization of the social and political life of our country, and in the creation of conditions which would ensure greater personal liberty as regards the search for truth, freedom of expression and opportunities to exert a real influence on the life of the community. If we are to achieve this, then we must recognize that there exists in Polish society a

plurality of ideologies. This pluralism encompasses a much broader spectrum of views than that implied by the division of the population into Catholics and Marxists. We have in mind here not only philosophical or religious differences, but also differences in approach to social, economic and political problems and to problems of culture and civilization. Pluralism in no way prevents the nation from achieving moral and patriotic unity; on the contrary, such unity can only exist in a pluralistic system. In the first place, all honest, thinking citizens of our country, irrespective of the ideological differences which divide them, have a common concern for the good of the whole community, for the country's material, economic and cultural progress and for its place in the community of nations. Secondly, this unity should be formed over and above the existing pluralism. We agreed with Edward Gierek when, in his speech at the 2nd Party Conference, he said that "the way to solve the country's fundamental problems was by means of a national policy which would override all the existing or possible differences in our society arising from varying social or professional circumstances, levels of education, local traditions and attitudes to religion".

The obstacle to this sort of unity is pluralism. Pluralism is an unavoidable reality, but failure to recognize, perceive or respect it leads to silence and the stifling of opinions. The obstacle lies in the tendency to create an illusion of ideological uniformity, which is actually non-existent. To recognize pluralism as something which neither hinders nor precludes unity and enables people to voice their opinions about the ways and means of achieving common goals, opens up the prospect of true and honest dialogue and cooperation, and paves the way to a national unity which is real and not merely apparent.

Recognition of pluralism and, by the same token, of true equality of rights for all citizens, must be the basis for dealing with the demands made by the Church and churchgoers in Poland. This would make possible an effective dialogue between Church and State, between Catholics and Marxists, resulting in constructive cooperation for the good of the whole nation. The thousand

years of our history contain many examples of creative cooperation between Church and State. The great goals of peace, justice, brotherhood and freedom are common to believers and unbelievers, to Catholics and socialists. It is

therefore worth trying to create conditions in which such cooperation for the common good would be possible today: surely this would be the most effective way to true national unity in the interest of higher aims and values.

Monks Appeal for Reopening of Monastery

The Kiev Monastery of the Caves, founded in the 11th century, was one of the great religious centres of the Russian Orthodox Church. It was closed in 1929 on the basis of a resolution passed in 1926 by the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee (VUTsIK) and the People's Commissariat for the Ukraine which decided that the monastery should be turned into a museum. But in 1941 during the German occupation a number of monks returned to the monastery and reestablished monastic life there. At the end of the '50s (Khrushchev launched an anti-religious campaign in 1959) the monks (by then about 100) were no longer left in peace and by 1961 they were driven out and the monastery was closed (see "Monasticism in the Soviet Union" by Marite Sapiets, RCL, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 28-34).

In late 1977 the Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights in the USSR distributed the following document from former monks of the Kiev Monastery of the Caves, which is dated 18 September 1977.

To the President of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR,
Leonid Ilich Brezhnev

STATEMENT

Urgent necessity compels us to turn to you: we, the monks of the Kiev Monastery of the Caves, which in 1961 was closed temporarily for repairs, have found ourselves dispersed and, already for 16 years, have been waiting in vain for our return to our own cloister.

The Orthodox people, troubled to the depth of their souls by the closing and the violation of our holy place, which is so firmly and organically bound up with the history of our Motherland, and deprived of the right to revere the holy relics of the Kiev Monastery's saints of

God, who showed to the world the fullness and glory of Orthodoxy, have repeatedly turned to the civil powers with fervent prayers for the opening of the monastery. And since the official organs (for instance the executive committee of the Kiev town soviet) replied that the monastery was closed because "the monks themselves had left and now there is no one wishing to inhabit the monastery", the people accused us, the monks, of remaining silent and being indifferent to the fate of the monastery.

We however, have only been praying, weeping and waiting . . .

By this statement we join our voice to that of the faithful and fervently beg you to open the Kiev Monastery of the Caves and to allow us to restore the monastic community in it.

All the undersigned express a firm desire to inhabit their own home, a desire long suffered in exile. We express the hope that our request will be complied with and that we will be allowed to celebrate the Liturgy in the Cradle of Russian Orthodoxy, beside the relics of the saints of God.

And the Church's prayer for peace and prosperity in our country, rising from the sacred vaults of the monastery, stills the great confusion which has gripped the Orthodox people, who long to revere the relics of the Kiev Monastery's saints.

Brothers of the Kiev Monastery of the Caves:

1. *Skhiarkhimandrit** PROKHOR (DUBROVSKY)
2. Titular abbot ISAIYA (KORIN)
3. Titular abbot AKHILA (ORLOV)
4. Titular abbot MOISEI (VALIGURA)
5. Hiero-monk MODARI (MOSHOV)
6. Hiero-monk ANDREI
7. Hiero-monk VENIAMIN (SELIVANOV)
8. Archdeacon PIMEN (SHUVALOV)

*A hermit Archimandrite