

Non possumus! Memoriał Episkopatu polski do władz PRL - Tekst angielski

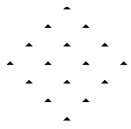
After a long period of silence on the subject of the Catholic Church in Poland, the Episcopate would now like to express our opinion at this significant moment. At a time when the Catholic press have already said almost everything and when an event happened that appears to have ended the period started on 14 April 1950 with the Agreement between the Episcopate and the Polish Government and begun a new period, an incomparably more difficult and complex one, we find it appropriate to describe the past three years of religious life in Poland.

For the Polish Episcopate, among the positive phenomena that have influenced the relations between the Church and the Polish State are most of all the Agreement between the Episcopate and the Polish Government concluded in 1950 and the beginning and continuation of the talks between the parties. We would also like to appreciate all efforts aimed at finding compromise despite our different attitudes. Conducted most often in a solemn atmosphere, the negotiations brought very distant points of view together. The Polish Episcopate admits that in the period in question up until the past days, the Church has still maintained a number of the most fundamental rights and freedoms. In particular, religious life in our country could still develop at relative ease and without major hindrance. The Catholic society has already managed to rebuild a great number of destroyed temples. Others are still under reconstruction. And contrary to what is sometimes said abroad, nobody – except for special cases – does not close churches or chapels in Poland. It is quite the opposite, the State has contributed greatly to their reconstruction, and we truly appreciate that as well.

Those are indeed maintained and protected goods and taken chances, all of which must have been taken into account by the Episcopate in our predictions three years ago together with any unavoidable damage and danger so that we could fully and correctly assess which of the paths we could then take hid fewer surprises, failures and risks and left the Church with more freedom and possibility to act.

The above-mentioned facts have great significance that cannot be left unnoticed or unanalysed. Their importance, however, is enclosed within clearly defined boundaries, beyond which we can see a different reality, one that is much more tragic for Catholicism in Poland.

The Polish Episcopate feels responsible for stating that the situation of the Polish Church not only fails to constantly improve but in fact gradually worsens. It appears from the analysis of the last three years that it has experienced most of all dangerous negative phenomena. Our responsibility towards God, the society and history demands that at least the most important ones are openly described in detail.



1. Removing religion from school and God from young people's hearts

Despite previous solemn assurances, a great number of Catholic schools have been closed even after 1950. Others are slowly vanishing while subsequent classes are dissolved. Those few schools that still exist were forced to introduce anti-Christian ideology to their programme.

The situation of the Catholic University of Lublin is becoming increasingly difficult and uncertain. Several professors have been removed from the university for unknown reasons, and the Faculty of Law and Economics has been closed. This way, the only Catholic university in the country can no longer freely perform its role and thus loses its nature of a Catholic institution.

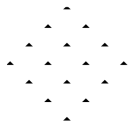
Religious education is gradually removed from state schools under the pretence of turning those schools into institutions of the Association of Children's Friends (Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Dzieci). Resigning from religious education is as a matter of fact a result of this purely formal transformation and indeed its only purpose. (...)

Catholic children in Poland, a country that has been Catholic for a thousand years and where over 90 per cent of people are Catholics, attached to their faith the strongest, are brought up and educated against their parents' will in a Marxist way and an atmosphere that is no longer religiously indifferent but now simply anti-religious and anti-Christian. (...)

One does not have to add that such educational policy, despite the official terms of the Agreement, is in glaring contradiction to natural and universal laws, the rights specified in the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic and the regulations of the decree on the freedom of conscience and religion.

2. Political pressure and means of sabotage in the clergy

There are special forms of pressure and methods used against the Catholic clergy. Catholic priests are involved in an otherwise beneficial "peace campaign", one that in its nature resembles an unscrupulous political fight. They are forced to politics instead of being allowed to freely spread gospel truths, especially the truth about love, and to promote Christian moral and religious principles, without whose consideration it is impossible to think seriously about a genuinely peaceful world or honest understanding and union between nations torn apart by hatred. (...)



3. Ruthless destruction of Catholic press and publishing houses

Apart from educational politics, there is probably no other sphere that would experience such strong perseverance as the one found in the regular and persistent destruction of the rich heritage of the Catholic thought and culture, magazines and publishing houses. Three state institutions acted harmoniously together in this destructive campaign under the guidance of the Office for Religious Affairs: “Ruch” (focusing on distribution), the institution rationing paper and the one controlling the press. (...)

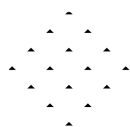
4. Interference in Church affairs and attempts at restricting its freedom

We cannot pass over the cases of offices for the control of press trying to interfere with time-honoured dogmatic expressions or liturgical texts that went past their censors. The imprimatur the Church authorities had been previously given was removed from not only magazines but also Catholic book publications. A short mention was eventually approved but not without huge efforts.

All congregations were at some point ordered to register, but this registration was conditional upon state factors that were still to decide on their legal status.

Administrative authorities often removed from their posts parish priests, deans, vicars, bishops coadjutor, apostolic administrators and even bishops ordinary, while newly appointed bishops were not allowed to take charge of the dioceses to which they were assigned by the Pope. They also interfered in the nomination of vicars capitular, which in this case naturally made elections held in such conditions invalid. We hope, however, that these were occasional acts committed without awareness of the fact that they violated one of the most fundamental principles in the Catholic Church.

It was only the Decree of 9 February 1953 on Filling Ecclesiastical Positions that became a kind of an unexpected but official attack on the organizational freedom of the Church. For the authorities that issued the decree, it is undoubtedly meant as a legal basis for a more systematic interference of the State in Church authorities. The interpretation and thus enforcement of the decree may turn out to be quite broad. It aims at restricting the establishment of new positions in the Church and transformation or elimination of the already existing ones and making such decisions dependent on the approval of specific state authorities. (...) It is clear that the decree, which influences the structure of the Catholic Church to such a broad extent, is clearly against not only canon law but also the rights of bishops ordinary and the sovereign authority of the Pope or even the Agreement between the Church and the Polish State itself, in which the Polish government formally accepted Pope’s jurisdictional authority over the Church. (...)



5. Particularly tragic plight of the Church in the Western Territories

It is worth mentioning that the unfavourable attitude of the Government towards the Church in reborn Poland does not change towards a more conciliatory one even when it would seem beneficial from the perspective of the reason of state. (...)

6. Efforts undertaken by the Episcopate and conclusions drawn from its experience

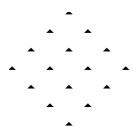
Did the Polish Episcopate want to enter into the Agreement with the Government? There were sound reasons against it. We had heard news about the fate that had befallen the Church in other people's democracies! One could be worried if the other party would show any good will and honour their commitments. The Marxist ideology itself displays characteristics that are alarming for religion, not to mention the fact that there were many words of caution against the Agreement reaching the Episcopate from the whole country. (...)

The Polish Episcopate has been faithful in fulfilling its responsibilities accepted in the Agreement and will continue to do so, but we do not stop here. Constantly striving after reconciliation and internal peace, we promote reconciliation and peace in accordance with our doctrine and for the real good of the Catholic and Polish community. (...)

7. Statement of the Episcopate

Acting from a sense of duty, the Polish Episcopate hereby emphasizes the tragic fate of the Church in Poland, the signs of oppression and its reasons and the sources of the concern, anxiety and bitterness of vast masses of the Catholic society.

We seek the main and the most significant cause of this state in hatred, which destroys the strength of our state and seems to be a harbinger of some ominous discord. What we do is not aimed at any polemics but at highlighting the desperate need to find an honest and reliable way out of the current situation. We are looking for a positive solution that would be beneficial for both the Church and the State, for there is nothing more alien to us than destroying unity or introducing or spreading hatred. That is why this time, as always, we do not turn our backs or disregard our will for peace and cooperation in efforts undertaken to develop the relationship between the Church and the State in accordance with the Agreement concluded on 14 April 1950. (...)



Similarly, if we were faced with a choice between ecclesiastical jurisdiction handed over as a tool of secular authorities and personal sacrifice, we would not hesitate. We will pursue our vocation and pastoral conscience and follow our internal peace and the fact that we have not provided any reason for oppression and that we now experience suffering for nothing else than Christ and the Christian Church. We cannot sacrifice God's matters at Caesar's altar. Non possumus!

We respect everyone's personal opinions and beliefs, including the beliefs of our current opponents, whom we – as Christians – cannot hate. We do, however, demand that similar respect is shown to opinions and religious beliefs of Polish Catholics, including especially children and young people. We respect and often remind our congregation about their civic duties towards the nation and the State but at the same time demand that Catholics are not faced with obstacles when fulfilling their duties towards God and the Church. (...)

For the sake of our Nation, we have the right to demand from the leaders of the Marxist bloc that they revise the principles of absolute hatred and ostracism towards religion, God and the Church. The Polish Episcopate demands that the Council of Ministers starts defending the rights of Catholics in the Polish People's Republic in accordance with Article 32(7) of the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic.

In the name of the Polish Episcopate
Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński
Archbishop of Gniezno
Archbishop of Warsaw
Primate of Poland

Bishop Zygmunt Choromański
Secretary of the Episcopate

(Kościół katolicki a państwo w świetle dokumentów 1945-1989 [The Catholic Church and the State in the light of documentation 1945–1989], ed. P. Raina, vol. 1: years 1945-1959 [Poznań, 1994])