

Introduction

Despite the importance of religion in the many countries of the former Soviet Union, little current scholarship has arisen to analyze the directions it is taking. As a modest first step in this direction, RST presents here the work of several Polish writers who train their discerning eye on the post-Soviet Church. This is all the more important because Pope John Paul II regarded Poland in a special light. We are pleased that Professors Edward Możejko (University of Alberta) and Kazimierz Z. Sowa (Jagiellonian University) have co-edited this special volume on contemporary religion in Poland.

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This special issue of *Religious Studies and Theology* is devoted to social and political questions related to the Catholic Church in Poland after the downfall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe. The six articles included in this volume discuss various aspects of Polish Catholicism and its relation to society in the new political environment, particularly to new democratic institutions that have been developed since 1989. However, at the same time all articles contain a historical perspective that reveals the role of the Church in shaping the identity of the Polish nation throughout the centuries of its existence. The loss of independence at the end of the eighteenth century, and the partition of Poland by three neighboring powers—Russia, Prussia and Austria—changed the pillars on which the existence of the nation depended. There were two non-Catholic states among the three invaders and this had a significant impact on the role of the Polish Church. From 1795 until 1918 when Poland regained its independence, the life of Poles revolved around two basic social institutions: the family and the Church. During that time, Catholicism and Polishness intertwined. A similar pattern emerged and repeated itself during the period of communist rule, that is, the so-called People's Republic of Poland (1945–1989).

Consequently, each time Poland regained its independence, the Church credited itself as a “savior of the nation” and claimed its right to occupy special or somewhat privileged status within the revived sovereign state structure. In this situation the separation of the Church from the State became a delicate, if not difficult, issue to resolve.

This is reflected to some extent in the articles by Professor Franciszek Adamski *L'Église catholique et le nouveau régime socio-politique en Pologne* and Professor Janusz Mariański's *The Roman Catholic Church in Poland and civil society: contradiction or complementarity?* Both authors aim at maintaining objectivity and balance when describing the “heavenly” mission of the Church and “the earthly” tasks of the state, yet one can discern in their approach a clear hint that the Roman Catholic Church in Poland must find a place within the new democratic socio-political system and play a significant role in its future development. While examining the role of the Catholic Church and religion in the development of a democratic and pluralistic society, they address normative rather than descriptive aspects. What differentiates these authors is perspective: in F. Adamski's view the Polish people constitute, first of all, a nation (a traditional political unit), while J. Mariański sees them as a contemporary civil society. According to him it seems clear that the Catholic Church in Poland is accepting more and more definitively the rules and principles of pluralistic society. So, the Church—Mariański says—is gradually withdrawing from political life, whereas Adamski stresses rather the continuity of its involvement in public life of the nation. These important papers prepared by two outstanding and experienced Polish sociologists of religion show in a sense two possible views of the future relations between the Polish Church and the society.

Polish religiousness—mainstream and peripheries by Dr. Kamil Kaczmarek gives a compelling survey of various currents within the Catholic Church and shows how they react to or interpret fundamentals of the faith. The author tries to depict the Polish religiousness using four major lines of religious divisions: “ecclesia militans” vs. “ecclesia dialogans,” patriarchal vs. matriarchal religion, folk vs. “involved” religion, and “orthodox” vs. “dissident” religion. The first division was produced by the history of Poland, especially during the time of partition and/

or political oppression when the Polish Catholic Church became an “ecclesia militans,” while the church in Western Europe could be called rather “ecclesia dialogans.” After the turning point of 1989 both the militant and dialogue traditions paved the way for a new division—closed vs. open Church. The dominant type of contemporary Polish religiousness came into being by the gradual “modification” (urbanization) of traditional folk religiousness. Kaczmarek argues that “modernized” folk religiousness is characterized by ceremony, collectivity, emotionality, “miracularity” (openness to miracles), concreteness of imaginations, and also by relatively strong independence from Church moral and theological teaching. This religiousness is rather more of matrimonial than patrimonial type (the latter implying warlike or intellectualistic). The author also analyzes the situation of non-Catholic religious movements in contemporary Poland. The current position of these movements is shaped by contradictory tendencies: a heritage of traditional Polish tolerance (officially represented mostly by State and Church authorities), and the attitudes of some lay Catholics conducting, on the local level, the “cult” struggle with the “sects” which is fueled by sensation-seeking mass media.

K. Kaczmarek’s article parallels to some extent Prof. Kazimierz Sowa’s analysis of the relationship between the Church and political landscape of today’s Poland. In his paper titled *Rise and fall of the Christian Democrat’s Movement*, Sowa explains why in postcommunist Poland—a country with 95% of the population identifying themselves as Catholics—Christian democratic parties have played practically no political role. Starting with short historical remarks, the author points out that Christian democratic parties have developed in those countries where separation of state and church had indeed been introduced. In Poland the formal separation of state and church was introduced by communists at the beginning of the 1950s during the twentieth century, although it was not a genuine separation but rather a substitution of one religion with another (Catholicism with Marxism-Leninism). For the Polish people it meant not only state secularization but further ideological and national oppression. So, instead of weakening, the separation reinforced the old connection of religious and national feelings of Poles. After Poland regained political independence in 1989,

the Catholic Church acquired a strong influence on national public life and on all Polish political parties. Paradoxically as it may sound, political movements in postcommunist Poland have not been able to create a Christian democratic party that would even remotely resemble, for example, the Christian Democrats of the neighboring Federal Republic of Germany. Rather, only a Christian party of nationalist slant had some opportunity to make an impact on the Polish political scene. The author believes that nothing but genuine separation of the Church from the state will pave the way for better prospects of Christian Democrats in Poland.

In her paper *Societal Activity of the Polish Parish—Continuity and Change*, Prof. Elżbieta Firlit discusses the adaptation processes of Polish parishes to the new socio-cultural conditions generated by the Polish systemic transformation started in 1989. She deals with the parish as a basic unit of the Catholic Church administration and as an institution of local communities as well. These processes of continuation and change are shown by the analysis of the following issues (during the period 1990–2006): dynamics of structural change of the Polish parishes; intensification of political influence on, and social functions (charity, cultural, educational, and economic) of parishes for parishioners; development of local Catholic associations and organizations; attitudes of Poles towards the role of the Catholic parish. It turns out that in rapidly changing social conditions, traditional cultural and institutional resources of the Polish parish haven't been a barrier for coming changes; on the contrary—they have been distinctly enabling. Polish parishes have successfully adapted to the political, economic, and cultural changes including those connected with the appearance and growth of information technology. While retaining traditional values, the parish remains an elastic and open structure that enables people to merge old values with up-to-date elements of social life.

In the closing paper *The role of the Polish Church and Slavlands in the evangelizing mission of John Paul the II*, Professor Zbigniew Stachowski reconstructs Wojtyła's concept of the theology of the nation and its application in relation to Slavic nations. The specific role of the Polish nation has especially been stressed, as John Paul II ascribed to it an outstanding historic mission, the re-Christianizing

mission of Central and Eastern Europe. John Paul II read the history of nations in the light of the Gospel, recognizing this way of interpreting history as a specific “hermeneutic key” that allows us to understand both the world and human history. According to the author, the Pope held that this model could be extended to all Slavlands, in effect generalizing the Polish historic experience to others. In this way, his dream was to build the Christian world “from the Atlantic to the Urals” along the same lines. Poland, as “the chosen nation,” universalizes the ideas of the Polish theology of nation, and thus contributes to a Slavic universality that transforms into a Christian universality. In his concluding remarks, the author makes it clear that this missionary vision of Pope John Paul II proved to be unsuccessful. As such, this article is one of the first examples that questions the infallibility and indisputable “cult of the Pope” in Polish cultural discourse.

As a whole, this collection of articles makes an attempt to present current problems of the Catholic Church in Poland on various levels of its comprehensive religious and social activity. We would like to emphasize once again that contemporary relations between Church and State in Poland are profoundly conditioned by the political and cultural history of the Poles and of the Polish State. Without this historical knowledge, proper understanding of Poland’s current socio-political reality is an extremely difficult, if not hopeless, task.

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