The Church and Contemporary Social Dynamics in Poland

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The author has had the privilege of visiting Poland five times in the last decade. Four were relatively brief visits in August 1971, September 1978, September 1979 and May 1980. The most recent and lengthiest opportunity to become directly acquainted with contemporary realities in Poland was from September 23 to December 7, 1980 when Professor Will led a group of theological students who studied at the Christian Academy of Theology, Warsaw, the Academy of Catholic Theology, Warsaw, and the Catholic University of Lublin, with brief visits also to Gdansk, Katowice, and Krakow. This period coincided with the very important social developments precipitated by the strikes which began in Gdansk and spread throughout the country during August 1980.

ESSENTIAL HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Contemporary Poland cannot be understood without clearly comprehending how intimately the Christian Church has been involved with the origin and development of the Polish nation. Some East Slavonic tribes were united into the beginning of the Polish nation-state in 960 under the Piast Prince, who was converted to Christianity in 966. In 1024 the Pope agreed both to the Piast Prince being crowned King of Poland and to the national independence of the Polish Church by removing them from the jurisdiction of the German Metropolitan of Magdeburg and creating a new Polish Metropolitan of Gniezno. Thus Christianity was profoundly implicated in the formation of the Polish nation.

We cannot retrace within the limits of this paper the millenial-long history of this church-state relationship. But we must at least note the intimate bond which grew between Polish nationalism and the Roman Catholic Church because of the centuries of political struggle between Poland and a Lutheran Prussia on its western border and an Orthodox Russia on its eastern border. The fact that Poland had a constitutional monarchy after 1505 and an elected King after 1672 also put them at some political disadvantage between their two absolutist neighbors. Of the 11 million citizens of Poland at the
beginning of the 18th century, the Czar of Russia claimed to be the "protector" of the 5 million who were Orthodox and the King of Prussia made the same claim regarding the 200,000 who were Protestants, thereby justifying continuous interference in the politics of Poland. After an alliance between Prussia, Russia and a politically expansionist Austria in the 18th century, these political-religious struggles led to the partitioning of Poland between these three powers in 1773, 1793 and 1795. Poland lost her independence for 123 years. During this period without a Polish state, the bond between the Polish nation and the Roman Catholic Church was so strengthened that many Polish patriots came to accept the motto first expressed by the Bishop of Parmia during the counter-reformation--"to be truly Polish is to be Roman Catholic." This contentious slogan was based on the reality that during the period of partition it was largely the Roman Catholic Church which carried and protected the Polish national identity.

The Versailles Treaty of 1919 restored independence to Poland for twenty years, until the treaty of Von Ribbentrop and Molotov followed by the German invasion of 1939 led to a new partition in which the Soviet Union took all of the territory east of the Bug River and Nazi Germany occupied all the rest. During the terrible period of 1939-45, six million Poles were exterminated. After Germany was defeated in 1945, Poland regained independent statehood, as a part of the bloc of East European nations led by the Soviet Union, with a socialist state led by the Communist Party. The Soviet Union kept the territories east of the Bug River, but Poland was compensated by being given western territories formerly under German control, from which most German Protestants fled to the West. The consequence was and is an almost religiously homogeneous nation, with more than 90% of the population now being Roman Catholic. Thus the historic bond between the Polish nation and the Roman Catholic Church was strengthened by the consequences of World War II.

One cannot understand the role of the church in contemporary Poland without comprehending their history, which explains the nationalism of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland and the Catholicism of the Polish nation, even after communist rule during one generation of Polish history.

INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTH OF THE CHURCH

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ORTHODOX AND PROTESTANT CHURCHES

The Orthodox Church was once strongly present in Poland due to the union of Poland and Lithuania, which had ten Orthodox dioceses under the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Orthodox Church of Poland became autocephalous in 1924. The Reformation especially in the form of Calvinism had an early and strong influence on the Polish nobility. There was even a brief period in the late 16th century when Protestants constituted a majority of the Polish parliament, which was composed exclusively of representatives of the nobles. But Protestantism declined to a very small minority in contemporary Poland because it never reached into the peasant class and became too identified with the national interests of Germany and Sweden during some historical periods.

Today there are 450,000 members of the Orthodox Church in Poland, 100,000 Protestants, and approximately 50,000 Old Catholics. These thirty minority churches all live in great dispersion within the decisively Catholic majority.

The largest eight of these thirty are united in the Polish Ecumenical Council: the Orthodox, Polish Catholic, Old Catholic Mariavite, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist, Baptist and United Evangelical. Prof. Witold Benedyktowicz, Superintendent of the Polish Methodist Church, has been President of the Council since 1977. Dr. Zdzislaw Pawlik, Baptist, is its General Secretary.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

In the constitution of Poland of 1919-1939 the study of religion was compulsory in the public schools. The Communist-led government carried through a separation of church and state after 1948 which required the separation of religious instruction from public education. Though at first strongly resisted, the churches have discovered that the relocation of Christian education in parish centers has greatly strengthened the church. About 15,000 persons now work as catechists in the Catholic parishes. From 30-40% of the average parish priest's time is now spent in catechization of children and youth, assisted by women religious and lay people.

Over 90% of the children of Poland who have not yet received their first Holy Communion attend such instruction. In the higher grades of elementary school the percentage drops to 50%, and in secondary schools it is 30%. In parishes especially related to universities, special catechization for students is provided, consisting of lectures and discussion on Catholic philosophy and theology, preparation for marriage, personal ethics and social problems. Poetry readings, dramatic presentations often presented voluntarily
Poland. He reports that Poland is now 93% Catholic by baptism, 3% are members of other churches, and 4% are non-believers. The Catholic Church is now organized in 17 dioceses with 79 Bishops and 7,556 parishes with over 10,000 church buildings and 1,600 chapels served by 15,444 priests. In addition there are 42 monastic institutes for men with 4,207 religious priests, 1,477 brothers and 1,399 seminarians in 1978. There are 25,313 women religious, 823 novices and 450 postulants in 2,449 houses in Poland.

This impressive institutional strength continues to grow. The number admitted to diocesan seminaries from 1973-78 increased about 48%, and the increase from 1978-79 accelerated because of the effect of the election of Cardinal Wojtyła as Pope and his papal visit to Poland. In 1979 there were 1,082 more students in diocesan seminaries than in 1971, and 675 more in monastic seminaries, for a total of 5,845 candidates for the priesthood in 24 diocesan and 22 monastic seminaries. About 60% of the student candidates go all the way to ordination. The only part of the Catholic Church in Poland not realizing such growth is the religious orders for women. From 1960-65 there was a precipitous decline of 50% in the number of novices entering women's orders. The number then held fairly steady for the next decade, 1965-75, and has shown a slight growth since.

The most difficult aspect of institutional church growth in this socialist society is in the construction of new church buildings, which requires authorization by the state. There was strong state cooperation in many cases as 871 churches destroyed during World War II were reconstructed following the war. But for 25 years it was very difficult to build new churches, so that only 352 were constructed for 1945-70. Restrictions were eased after 1970, however, so that 186 new churches have been constructed during the last decade plus 153 new or enlarged chapels and 51 new buildings for catechization. Still, the Catholic Church is hampered in its pastoral care because of difficulty in creating new parishes. In 1979 the average parish had 4,500 people, but the largest had over 40,000, primarily because of governmental opposition to the creation of new parishes and construction of new church buildings. There are about 500 parish centers which function as parishes, though not yet registered as such by the government. In 300 parishes people must travel over 12 kilometers to reach their parish church.
by professional actors, and social activities are also frequent. About 10% of all the students in Poland are involved in such student groups. All in all, it is perhaps one of the most successful national programs of Christian education to be found in Europe, at least as measured by the degree of voluntary participation, but also perhaps when measured by basic attitudes toward the Christian faith in the Polish population as a whole. In 1968 a public opinion poll indicated that 86.6% of the population thought of themselves as deeply involved believers. Ten years later in 1978 a similar poll showed the percentage to be almost the same at 86.4%. The small remainder categorize themselves as religiously indifferent or non-believers.

This does not mean that young people in contemporary Poland find it easy to integrate the Christian tradition mediated to them by the church and the contemporary ideology they are confronted with in the public schools and mass media. This may be seen in that a surprisingly large number of young people, especially between the ages of 15 and 20, go through a crisis of faith often resulting in deep, personal religious commitment. Research at the University of Warsaw reveals that 25% of the students active in the churches' student work come from families where neither parent practiced the Christian faith. Further research showed that 10% of the students in the University of Warsaw accepted 100% of the theological and moral teaching of the Catholic Church, another 10% accepted none of it, while 80% were selective or unsure. More widespread research in religiosity in the whole of Poland during the last twenty years indicates clear trends in two similar directions. About 10% of the people are deepening their religious life within the model of traditional religiosity mediated by the church, especially in a movement called "Oases" and through groups of "neocatechumenates." But the larger trend is toward "selective religiosity." More than 30% of the population declare themselves as believing Catholics who practice more or less frequently but who neither adhere unconditionally to the doctrine nor fully submit to the guidance of the church. This tendency toward selective religiosity is especially common among young people, persons with higher education and persons doing highly specialized work.

Research on sexual morality carried out in 1978 amongst 2,500 persons in a parish in southern Poland revealed that: 81% agreed with the church's position against adultery, 68% accepted the teaching on divorce, 63% accepted the teaching against sexual relations before marriage, and 60% agreed to the traditional teaching on the use of contraceptives.
CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The theological faculties of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow (founded 1364) and the University of Warsaw (founded 1816) were removed from the universities by act of the government in 1954. At that time the Christian Academy of Theology was founded by the same act as the continuation of the Evangelical Faculty of Theology of the University of Warsaw. This faculty is authorized to give Master, Doctorate and Habilitation Doctorate theological degrees. It is organized in three sections, with five faculty chairs in the Protestant section and five in the Orthodox plus one in the Old Catholic. There are now 126 students full-time in the five year course. Students studying part-time while serving parishes bring the total to about 150 students.

This academy is perhaps the most ecumenical in Europe. Ten widely variant Confessions, from Orthodox to non-Trinitarian, are represented in it. At the inauguration for the Academic Year 1980-81 for example, the liturgy was led by an Orthodox Professor and the homily preached by a Seventh Day Adventist Dozent. Some subjects are taught in common: languages, philosophy and the universal history of the church; others are taught separately according to the various traditions.

Being detached from the university has meant increased opportunity. They now have their own rector and faculty senate and control their own budget. One of the things this means is that they now publish much more than earlier because the budget is available. Most Protestant theology before World War II was taught in German using German literature. Since 1945 there has been a strong motive to produce their own Polish theological literature, and in a way that does not simply reproduce the German. The budget is entirely underwritten by the state, as it is for the Academy of Catholic Theology.

The Academy of Catholic Theology is, of course, a much larger institution. Its total teaching staff now numbers more than 200, of which 116 have full rights. Some of the lecturers from the outside who teach at this academy come even from the Polish Academy of Science, perhaps the most prestigious research and teaching faculty in Poland. The total full-time student body in all programs numbers about 1,600, made up of priests, women religious and lay persons.

The faculty is creative in its critical reflection on the Catholic tradition. The present Dean of the faculty, Prof. Juos, whose doctoral study was supervised by Prof. Karol Wojtyła of the University of Lublin, criticizes the traditional mode of moral theology. He thinks a method which first grounds
itself positivistically in the exegesis of Scripture and/or the teaching of the magisterium, and then rationalizes its position by use of Aristotelian philosophy leads either to authoritarian deontological or rationalized eudaemonistic ethics. He understands ethics rather to be autonomous in that no "ought" may be logically derived from any "is." Thus the basis for moral judgments must be in "axiological experience," not in either empirical science or propositional revelation. Loving experience of the dignity of persons is the source of moral obligation. The dogmas of theology become relevant to ethics at the point of understanding the persons loved for their own sake. The theology of morality may not be dogmatic theology applied, but morality enlightened by dogma. In this way, he follows his famous mentor in trying to relate theology to the autonomous ethics of the Polish philosophical tradition, and to illumine the relation between Christian ethics and human rights, understood as generalizations of the experience of human dignity.

Similar illustrations could be given of creativity in other areas. My limited experience of this faculty allows me to point especially to Prof. Gogacz whose work in the history of theology and philosophy point toward a reinterpretation of Thomism as a theology of meeting which intends to correct the excessive neo-Platonism in Buber's theory of I-Thou relations; Prof. Skovronek in ecumenical theology who in the spirit of John Paul II's encyclical, Redemptor Hominis, stresses the omnipresence of Christ for the salvation of all humanity, interpreting the church as "where Jesus Christ is"; Prof. Pashierb, historian of art and published poet, who sees the Polish people as looking to the church for an understanding of the "amplitude of human destiny" in a flat, manipulated, technological culture; and Prof. Swiecicki, sociologist of religion, who is preparing a new generation for its mission of relating the Catholic tradition to the new urban, industrial and technological social and economic structures.

CHURCH PRESS AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC MEDIA

Much has been made in the western press of the fact that one of the points of agreement negotiated between the new union "Solidarnosc" and the Polish government on August 31, 1980, guarantees the broadcast of the mass on Sunday morning over Polish radio. This, of course, is significant because the church has had no access to the public media since a Communist government came to power. But its significance must be evaluated in the light of an oft-told story in Poland about previous negotiations over the same matter between the
church and government officials. As the story goes, the government offered to provide the church access to radio and TV if they would reciprocate by allowing the Communist Party access to the church's pulpits. The point is that these pulpits in 1980 with their direct access to three-quarters of the population including the working class remain the most effective mass media in Poland.

The Roman Catholic Church in Poland has had its own press, though the restricted circulation is too small to satisfy all the church's needs. There is no Catholic daily newspaper as such, but there are three Catholic weeklies with a combined circulation of almost 200,000 copies, as well as monthlies, bi-monthlies, quarterlies and annuals. There is also a significant press published by Catholics grouped in PAX and ecumenical Christians grouped in the Christian Social Association. Especially significant is the daily newspaper published by PAX, "Słowo Powszechne," with a daily circulation of 95,000 increased to 200,000 on Sunday. Though not directly a publication of the church, it is highly valued by the church. Thus the church has long had limited but significant access to the public through its own press.

THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIO-POLITICAL SITUATION

The comparative youth of the present Polish population is not yet well understood in the west. 70% of the population is under 35 years of age. The average age of the workers in the Gdansk Lenin Ship Yards, the center of the strike which led to the independent unions, is only 25 years. The Polish work force is probably the youngest in Europe. The new leader of the independent union Solidarnosc, Lech Wałęska, is just 38 years old. This age structure helps explain the demand for more rapid social change, often found in more youthful populations. The improved education of the working class provided by this socialist state is also relevant here. It is young, relatively well-educated workers who are now demanding participation in the decision-making processes which affect their lives.

The precarious economic situation in Poland is widely reported amongst us in the West. But the dynamics which created it are not always fairly interpreted. During the decade of the 70's, the regime of Edward Gierek sought a very rapid industrial expansion. They were under the necessity of creating millions of new jobs for those born in the post-World War II population boom, if the socialist promise of full employment was to be kept. They also had to try to satisfy the growing demand in the Polish population for more of the consumer goods which an industrialized society was supposed to
provide. The result was an attempt at a rate of expansion beyond their technical capacities, largely on the basis of borrowed foreign capital. The first half of the decade from 1970-75 went fairly well. But inflation of energy costs and recession in the West in the latter half of the decade meant they could not repay on borrowed capital by selling goods in the West as they had planned. The result is a foreign debt of more than $20 billion and a 50% deficit in international trade. Some factories begun 8 or 10 years ago are not yet in production. A much larger proportion of some other production must then be designated for export. Cutbacks on essential imports such as medicines were instituted. For the first time in decades, a Poland accustomed to eating well faced shortages of certain foods—butter, sugar, meat, even potatoes.

These severe economic difficulties caused great dissatisfaction with the leadership of their government and the Communist Party—a phenomenon entirely similar to what Jimmy Carter and the Democratic Party faced in the USA at the same time. In the latter half of the 70's, the Gierek government seemed to lose its capacity for realistic adjustment to the growing economic crisis. This fault was compounded by the ever larger incomes and privileges of many of the leaders, drawn from the vast flow of expansion capital entering the economy. While the wages of teachers, dentists and even medical doctors stayed in the range of 3-5,000 złs. per month, it is reported that some top governmental officials awarded themselves 100,000 złs. per month, plus in some cases almost unlimited expense accounts. Control over so large a flow of new investment led even to some instances of outright corruption. The indictments of some former officials are now before the Polish courts. The truth that power tends to corrupt, and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely, has been recognized again. Thus the emergence of the independent unions as a new means of democratic public control is fully understandable. It has been matched in part by a more openly expressed, critical spirit in the whole society, reflected in the Parliament, the journalists, the universities and the church.

THE CHURCHES' ROLE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL CHANGE IN POLAND

Given the religious profile of Poland, it is only the Roman Catholic Church that is in a position to exercise widespread social influence. At the parish level, this church has direct access to the three-quarters of the population who are practicing Catholics. The people look trustingly to the church for
information not distorted by censorship, and for the best expression of Polish public opinion. Sometimes the perspective in some parishes, in my opinion, is too conservative and even reactionary. But fortunately, it also is increasingly formed by the best of Catholic social thought as expressed in John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris* and Vatican Council II's *Gaudium et Spes*. Pastoral work in previous workers' strikes also has given some parishes direct influence in recent events. The parishes in Gdansk, for instance, had served the families of the workers killed and injured in the strike of 1970 so well that their priests, of course, were looked to for pastoral counsel during the momentous events of 1980.

The episcopate of the Roman Catholic Church, and especially its primate, Cardinal Stephan Wyszynski, has great spiritual, moral and social influence. The bishops have dealt with issues of social justice and human rights in Polish society on the basis of theological principles many times. On the tenth anniversary of *Pacem in Terris* in 1973, they held an important symposium on the realization of human rights as a necessary condition of both domestic and international peace. Among others, the right of all persons to participate in public life was stressed: "A person must not be a merely passive object of the government, but must be the active element of the social life." They took up no new theme, then, when the Main Council of the Episcopate met in special session during the crisis on August 26, 1980. Both the people and the government knew the church was speaking with an authentic voice when the episcopate called for: 1) an atmosphere of peace and internal order; 2) "honest dialogue" between elected strike committees and the government; and 3) an acceptance of the right of workers to organize independent unions, based on Section 68 of *Gaudium et Spes* where Vatican Council II had taught: "Among the basic rights of the human persons must be counted the right of freely founding labor unions... (and) taking part freely in the activity of these unions without risk of reprisal." It was no great surprise that these teachings became almost a prescription for the reality that unfolded, and that Cardinal Wyszynski's radio address to the nation stressing the workers' right to independent unions, while at the same time calling for non-violent negotiation, moderation in demands, and the need for new work discipline, carried great influence. The pastoral letter from the bishops read in all parishes on December 14, two days before the tenth anniversary of the day of violence of the 1970 strike, also carried the same balance between support
for change and responsible moderation.

At the highest level, one should also recognize the indirect influence of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła's election in 1978 as Pope John Paul II. There were, of course, the immediate religious results of increased participation in the mass and increased priestly vocations. But there was also a heightened national identity and pride, coupled with an increased readiness to exercise the right to freedom of speech. The papal visit to Poland in 1979 united the society in a way that had not been true for a long time. Even leading members of the party participated in these celebrations. Moreover, the self-discipline of the people in creating and ordering events involving hundreds of thousands of persons, in the face of very limited government cooperation, convinced the people of their capacity to organize on a large scale. In Warsaw, for instance, there were 10,000 "public militia" made up of church laity who controlled the vast crowds during the papal visit. Just as there was no violence during the papal visit of 1979, there was no violence during the massive strikes of 1980—in happy contrast to the tragic violence marking the strikes of 1956 and 1970. One of the fascinating statistics related to these events is the 30% decrease in the use of alcohol in Poland during the two months of the strikes. To keep the strikes well ordered, the strikers forbade themselves any alcohol. To know the drinking habits of the average Polish worker is to know what a strenuous exercise in self-discipline that was, and what a sign of new hope and meaning in daily life. There is a new form of very deep national pride in Poland expressed in stronger forms of self and social discipline; and the teaching and communal life of the church has contributed much to it.

The Orthodox and Protestant churches embrace so small a minority of the present Polish population that their social influence can only be very small. Approximately 3% of the people are in non-Roman Catholic churches, the most important eight of which are covenanted together in the Polish Ecumenical Council. Perhaps their most important contribution to the emergence of greater democracy in Poland is their interpretation of its meaning in other nations, both East and West. Their direct ties to the World Council of Churches and the Christian Peace Conference provide important channels. For instance, after the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) closed its Polish border, a representative of the Polish Ecumenical Council, invited to a regional meeting of the Christian Peace Conference, became one of the few Polish citizens able to cross that border and interpret the meaning of the continuing developments in Poland to fellow Protestants in this neighboring East-bloc country. Given the
irrational fears sometimes ideologically created, such an interpretation is no small service.

The last mode of church relation to these events to be noted is through the three organizations which mediate between church and state in Poland--Pax, Znak, and the Christian Social Association. Znak is made up of autonomous clubs of Catholic intellectuals, now grouped into "Old Znak" and "Parliamentary Znak." Some of the leaders of Old Znak, led by Mr. Mazowiecki, are major advisors to the leadership of the new union. Mr. Reiff, the president of Pax, has reiterated in Parliament since the strikes their proposal that Poland be officially recognized as an ideologically pluralistic state. The chairman of the Christian Social Association, Mr. Morawski, in a TV address on the eve of All Saints Day, analyzed the breakdown of trust in the Polish society and urged the necessity of moral renewal in speaking the truth dialogically to each other if Poland's severe problems were to be solved peacefully and justly. None of these three organizations are direct expressions of the institutional church, but all of them stand in relation to the church.

THE PROMISE AND PERIL OF DEMOCRACY IN POLAND

The significance of these events should neither be underestimated nor ideologically misunderstood by Americans. They are of enormous significance for the democratization of socialist Poland. A government and a party accustomed to command shall have to learn to negotiate. Government ministries and industrial managers accustomed to little or no public control shall now be submitted to public scrutiny. In short, a new level of actual democracy will be achieved. But it will be a socialist democracy! There is nothing in the constitution of the new union, and little in the realistic mood of the people, which intends to change the socialist basis of their system. There is appreciation for some of the accomplishments of this system--especially its opening of educational and cultural opportunities under very difficult conditions after World War II, allowing many poor workers and peasants fully to enter the society for the first time. To be sure, there is also criticism of its bureaucratic heaviness, arbitrariness and inefficiency and a determination to improve it. If nothing else, political realism and the memory of the failure of their alliances with France and England in 1939 lead Poles to accept their present alliance with the Soviet Union. Poland will remain Socialist Poland; but it may well presage a level of democratic socialism unique to Eastern Europe and pregnant with possibility for detente in the whole of Europe.
It is, of course, the Communist Party of Poland that continues to hold almost all the instruments of political power in its hands. But it must balance its power against and with the social power of the church and the social and economic power of the new union, on the one hand, and the pervasive military and economic power of the Soviet Union, on the other. One of the current jokes in Poland deals with the difficult job of Mr. Kania, the new First Secretary of the Communist Party, who must simultaneously convince the Polish people that they really now have independent unions, while convincing the leaders of the Soviet Union that they do not.

Mr. Kania was the party secretary in the Gierek government who most directly controlled the army and the police. It is said that while there were other members of the Politburo who advocated the use of force against the strikers, he always stood resolutely for a policy of settlement through negotiations. His policy prevailed; but as the new leader he faces a difficult task of consolidating a yet deeply divided party. We all know that it is not easy for those accustomed to command to learn to negotiate. There is still much internal disagreement in the party as to what the new style, policies and program should be. Perhaps the one element that could surely trigger a Soviet invasion would be their conviction that the Polish party had become internally too weak to be capable of governing. The question remains open as to whether the emergence of the new, independent unions will lead to the democratization of the Communist Party in Poland. But the promise of such a possibility is there.

What is promise to some, however, constitutes a threat to others. The German Democratic Republic has closed its Polish border, and Czechoslovakia virtually has done so, to isolate their societies at least temporarily from so dangerous a development. (Although there probably also are economic reasons, given the current shortage of consumer goods to Poland. And the armies of the Soviet Union sit a few kilometers away, while its official press lays down a propaganda barrage against the danger of independent unions. Yet it appears that the leaders of the Soviet Union know that they must leave the solution of this Polish crisis to Polish leaders. It should be remembered that unlike East Germany in 1953, Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, Soviet troops have never been sent against Poland in either 1956 or 1970. Though Soviet power, legitimate geo-political interests and irrational fears must be reckoned with, the western press sometimes sensationalizes the dangers in a way which is not calculated so much to benefit Poland as to sell newspapers.
Poland has a remarkable history in the last 35 years of keeping a democratic evolution of their socialist society on track while maintaining its basic alliance with the superpower on its eastern border. The dynamic of this evolution arises from the national patriotism of its Communist Party meeting the prudent use of the social power of the church in the context of the basic Christian faith of the Polish people. The evolution has not been easy and has not been able to proceed in a straight line. It has been much enhanced by the atmosphere of detente since the Helsinki Agreement. Many have suffered, and perhaps many still shall have to. But the promise of more domestic peace, based on greater justice, achieved through more democratic participation is real in Poland just now. For that all Christians and persons of good will everywhere should be grateful.