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## Polish Roman Catholic Church and European Union.

### Selected Cultural Issues

The religious ideas may influence various political institutions. For example, in the United States the tolerant and liberal theology with God of caring and concern predated social approval of the idea of welfare state. This kind of theology and the American popular religion supported the formation of the context within which Franklin Roosevelt could successfully conduct the welfare legislation of the 1930s - the conventional practice of conceptualising this connection suggest that ethics (ethical norms, often derived from religion) provides the link.

The article is basically concerned with some aspects of cultural situation of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland from the point of view of defining the Church as a cultural group. The Church's self-definition and the mental aspect of domination-subordination relations between Church and the State affect the 'social understanding' of the processes of EU's reshaping.

The Roman Catholic Church is the biggest religious organisation in Poland that has been closely connected both with state and culture for over one thousand years. A very significant fact is that some 93-94% Poles declare their affiliation to the Catholic Church [Adamczuk 1991, Mariański 1993, Marody 1994, Religijność Polaków 1984-1994 1994, Stachowski 1997, Religijność Polaków w III RP 1999]. This situation suggests that the present Church's point of view may modify some aspects of these processes on the societal and national levels. The basic distinctions in recognition of

the "true meaning" of the European Community by the Church's hierarchy and very influential, religiously fundamentalistic group are presented.

In spite of the new socio-political system that emerged in Poland after World War II and the policy of communist authorities that strongly aimed at atheism of the society, the Church was able to successfully build up religious life and restructure its actions and authorities.

In Poland during the communism, the Church itself functioned as a relatively independent social institution not affected very much by the political system. It enjoyed the actual, even if not formal, status of *primus inter pares* among other religions. It also served a real political function of the only legal opposition to the state organisation. This opposition had a moral, cultural as well as a political character. The state's struggle with the Church led to the built-up of the latter institutional reinforcement. Functioning at the same time as a centre of political criticism, the Church imposed restrictions on the wrongdoing of the Communist Party apparatus.

Observing post-transformational Polish reality (the political system transformation in Poland has started in 1989) we can see that the position of the RCC has been and continues to be special. Now, it starts to play the role of an important component of the official culture. The Church ceased to play the role of the only institutional exponent of the Opposition. Besides, with the emergence of the post-communist statehood and the possibilities of free expression of opinion, the Church lost its special character of the "only spokesman of the legal opposition". The modifications of the social and political environment of the Church activities exert the alternation of some Church's way of acting and its methods of adjustment to the reality.

From many points of view the Church can be defined as a culturally dominant social group in Poland. Its authorities are often able to force upon others their own normative system, and the patterns of actions approved by the institutional Church. One can observe the processes of monopolisation by the Church of the defining of social situations as right and desirable.

Some of the Church's members (including the part of the hierarchy) are, at the same time, adherents of the opinion that the RCC in Poland is (still and even increasingly so) oppressed and the social and religious life of its members is often defined and treated as a thing of a minor importance.

After the political system transformation in Poland the situation and the main players in the public sphere changed. Now, the RCC dominates within almost all sectors of social life. Together with the ongoing reconstruction of social structures, economic and political life, the Church has started to play the role of the key socio-political power.

Polish society--considerably supported in its activities by the Church--has won the battle on abolition of communist order. Atheism is no longer the state's official ideology. People, for whom the Church was the moral and often political support helping them to knock down the totalitarianism, became suddenly members of the state's authorities. These people--in most cases Catholics--have brought into politics their previous connections with the Church. The similarities between new governing politicians' and the Church's ideology evoked the situation in which the basic principles of Catholicism are involved in politics.

After the fall of communism in Poland, the feeling of victory has influenced and inspired the public Church's activities. It has been manifested very often in the intense support for the economic and political changes. Many of the Church's activists and leaders of Polish Christian-national political parties have been using this situation to demand for the Church the dominant status in the country.

One can observe a process of institutionalisation of religion in Poland, in terms of acquiring by the RCC the influence on state's institutions. It can be viewed also as obtaining a status of culturally dominant group in the country. It involves also many acquisitions against the Church that, for example, it is willing to establish a religious state in Poland.

Now in the late 1990s, a Polish political scene is dominated by continuous discussions and comments on various social issues connected with transformation of the economy, on the one hand, and with the Polish participation in the international political and economic structures, on the other. One stream of discussions comprises analyses of the polarised communities of beneficiaries and those who lost during the Polish system transformation. Another group of comments refers to various aspects of Poland's accession to the European Union and NATO.

Before we discuss the problem of the Polish Catholic Church's approach to integration processes between Poland and the EU, let us have a short look at the scope and level of support for Poland's accession to this organisation as it is shown in public opinion polls carried out in our country in the last few years. Generally speaking, the reports of the survey centres prove that majority of our society is in

favour of these processes. And thus, social acceptance for the integration goes up to 60-70% [Na drodze do Unii Europejskiej 1998]. Moreover, Poles declare more positive attitudes towards the European Union than representatives of other Central European countries that are now running for the accession. These attitudes appear both in public opinion polls and in politicians' and opinion leaders' declarations. At the same time, in the latter group as many as 95% of the declarations are positive, with average 81% of supportive attitudes at this part of Europe [Skotnicka-Illasiewicz 1999: 72].

The declared motivation of support for European integration in the national opinion polls refers to: a) possible opportunities for Poland to take advantage of clear regulations in a sphere of economic activity; b) positive geopolitical revision of the state's position; c) broadly understood civilisation progress connected with the access to the Western economic, technological and environmental standards [Skotnicka-Illasiewicz 1999: 75-76].

These pro-integrative opinions, however, are not stable. One third of the respondents (34%) think that the Western countries want integration in order to strengthen their power and importance and strive for subordination of weaker Eastern European countries [Na drodze do Unii Europejskiej 1998]. Moreover, support for the integration has been falling since 1997. At the same time, the feelings of fear and doubts or even opposition against the integration have been increasing steadily. These opposition attitudes have grown from 6% in 1994 to 19% in 1998 [Na drodze do Unii Europejskiej 1998]. The main fears refer to: a) the collapse of Polish agriculture, which seems an inevitable effect of Poland's accession to the EU (43%); b) a higher unemployment rate and purchase of the Polish property by a foreign capital (37%); c) the fall of industry and lower living standards in our country (18%) [Polacy o Unii Europejskiej 1998]. The analysis of numerous public opinion polls

shows a correlation between predictions of possible opportunities to acquire higher living standards and support for the integration processes. On the other hand, one's disappointing living conditions (financial status) and the lack of prospects for the future, as well as the awareness of the gap in these respects between Poland and the EU countries feed scepticism towards the integration. Such attitudes are dominant among farmers and in rural communities in general [Opinie o negocjacjach Polski... 1998].

It is more difficult to present any detailed information on the Polish clergymen's attitudes towards integration with the EU. The reason is that, in fact, there is no tradition to take public opinion polls in these communities in Poland. The attempts to study this community's opinions were made, but they usually met the refusal on the side of local bishops and other priests. So there is not enough empirical material to carry out any sound analysis. It is a real pity because this kind of information would be very important since for a remarkable majority of Poles a supportive opinion of the Polish RCC means legitimacy for many public decisions, political ones included [Hałas 1999: 202].

This disinclination of the RCC in Poland to opinion surveys was successfully overcome at the turn of 1997/1998, when one survey centre managed to receive permission from local bishops to carry out an opinion poll in a group of nearly 600 priests (half of them were parish priests and curates). Even though, the group was not, in my opinion, selected correctly because the respondents did not constitute a representative sample for the whole Polish clergy, the survey is interesting for both introductory and general diagnosis of the problem. The results of the survey surprised many. It turned out, contrary to commonly accepted opinion and more systematic observation, that perhaps as many as 84% of the surveyed clergymen would have supported Poland's accession to the EU if a referendum had been held

then. The surveyed understood that European integration was an unavoidable element of a much broader civilisation process and for this reason fighting against this integration was fruitless. At the same time they indicated to the threats the Europeanisation of Poland would bring to their priestly ministrations. More than half of them (54%) thought that the integration would endanger the Church itself. Among others, they predicted the growth of consumerism, expansion of religious sects and religious indifference.

The influence of the Polish institutional church is noticeable in the two main spheres. The prestige of Polish clergymen is built on social belief in their role as mediators between sacrum and profane and, in many communities as social leaders. Compared to other Catholic churches in Europe, the Polish church holds a strong position. Therefore, we can assume that Polish clergy may exert a remarkable influence upon different European church structures, for example upon the Commission of European Community Episcopates [Hałas 1999: 211].

In my opinion, the two most influential and opinion making communities in the Polish RCC, which shape the Polish Catholics' attitudes towards religious and also public issues, are the church hierarchy and the Catholic radicals group. Officially presented opinions and declarations of the Polish Episcopate representatives have been changing considerably. The opinions of radicals seem relatively stable with a slight tendency to radicalisation of their claims.

On November 4-7, 1997, at an invitation from the EU delegates of the Polish Episcopate went to Brussels. The visit was a landmark in the process of the hierarchy's opinion shaping. The previous declarations of Polish bishops had been extremely critical about both the EU itself, the integration and western politicians.

Since the authors of these opinions were well known and popular in Catholic communities bishops (Primate of Poland included) they received a broad response. For example, in August 1995, the Primate of Poland, cardinal Joseph Glemp, had expressed publicly the following opinion about the Western politicians: "They aim at such attenuation of Central and Eastern European countries so that they themselves would not be threatened with these countries' their potential - particularly with their spiritual power. [...] There are two ways to admit the poor in the circle of the rich. Either the poor will impress the rich with their mentality, industry and personality, or they reject their own mentality, way of life and fashions, and will disguise themselves in tails or jeans and imitate everything the rich do. It is not just a theory and it should be regarded in terms of independence: We should not indulge in the attempt to reduce human beings to a level of animals that please themselves with an easy job, good food, entertainment and sex" [Papież, biskupi i księża o Europie 1998].

However, not only this kind of opinions about the EU were spread in the church. In their public announcements, some members of the hierarchy presented Europe as a "wonderful chance, difficult challenge and great apostolic task for the church to achieve". Generally, there grew a clear discrepancy in the Episcopate of Poland between declared opponents of the EU and those who looked at the integration processes with hope. After the visit in Brussels, the two key Polish bishops: a then vice-president of the Polish Episcopate and archbishop Henryk Muszyński as well as a secretary of the Episcopate, bishop Tadeusz Pieronek, expressed a firm support of the RCC for the integration processes. Their TV declarations suggested that anti-European attitudes prove both spiritual and civil immaturity. These declarations were broadly commented and quoted in the Polish mass-media. Soon afterwards, the above mentioned opinion poll among Polish clergymen was done. At the same time, the hitherto opponents of the EU in the Episcopate of Poland started to declare entirely different views. The Primate of Poland began to speak about the church that is not



afraid of Europe and looks forward to the integration processes with hope. Another leading bishop, who once had described Western Europe as a new form of totalitarianism, half way through 1998, declared that we, Catholics "want to enter the European Union as believing Christians, and now we have the opportunity to help it to discover Christianity and many hundred years old values which have always been present in its culture" [Z wiarą do Europy 1998]. Now the institutional church addressed its members with the desire to work for the accession to the EU. Moreover, they showed the advantages of the integration and groundless fears part of Catholic communities in Poland were haunted by. Some leaders of hierarchy went as far as to include the integration issues in their priestly teachings [Hałas 1999: 212].

Clergy in Poland is commonly thought to be against Poland's integration with the EU. Perhaps the reason is that some influential Catholic communities display hostile approach by describing the EU and its liberal international culture as another disaster which is expected to replace the passed communism. A national Catholic radio channel 'Radio Mary' (fifth place in Poland with regard to the number of listeners) [Kraj w skrócie. Radia Maryja... 1998] that managed to mobilise a strong social movement called 'The Family of Radio Mary' carries out an extensive anti-European propaganda campaign in which it presents the integration as a plot of the world superpowers aiming at the destruction of Poland. The impact of this radio channel upon the social views of the clergy is difficult to estimate. However, one should remember that about 60% of Polish priests listen to its programmes relatively regularly, and half of them tunes them everyday.

This channel, as well as a national daily *Nasz Dziennik* (Our Daily) as well as declarations of people closely connected with this community depict the integrative processes as attempts to de-Christianise and to divest Poles of their national character. As one of best-known Polish priests said: "Making so-called Europeans of

us means to create an enigmatic collection of individuals subordinated to bureaucratic decisions made by commissaries of the United Europe in Brussels, and to achieve the goal the communists wanted to achieve for 44 years" [Kowalski 1997: 13].

The 'Nasz Dziennik' publishes a bulletin intended for its 'credible' readers. The bulletin published in 1998 consisted of several tens of quotations and short pieces of information from different Polish and foreign news agencies. The publication was titled Some of the "benefits" of the European Union. Most of the publication paints the reality in the EU a very dark colour. It lacks any comment from the editors but the selection of quotations and information, as well as titles of particular units (The EU Attacks the Church, Sanctions of the EU on other Countries) clearly show this daily's aversion to the integration with the EU's structures.

## Summary

For the last year and a half, the Polish Roman Catholic Church has been declaring, almost unanimously, the lack of fear of the United Europe, and the hopes connected with participation of the Church and the whole society in the new reality. The voice of the church influences remarkably opinions presented by many influential political and social communities. Moreover, the voice is essential because it is listened to and obeyed by churchgoers - members of this religious community. There is also another reason why the clergymen's attitudes towards the integration should be analysed. The Polish church is one of the key powers on the public and political scene. Its support means very often legitimacy for decision making. It even can be said that many political parties (and consecutive governments) build their group and political identity through relating their own ideology and practice to an official position of the institutional church and its opinion on various political and social questions, even

though Polish society, as I think, and its Catholicism is frequently strongly ritualised and pretty superficial. Also, we can assume that the support of Polish society for the integration processes is based on not a very deep reflection or strongly rooted attitudes. Moreover, it is trivial to claim that political decision making is more efficient when it receives a broad social support. Nevertheless, the more effective consequences of this type of decisions are, the stronger legitimacy mechanisms they require in order to assure the continuity of social order. The processes aiming at Poland's accession to the EU's structures arises both fears and hopes. Therefore, the church - if Polish bishops continue to show critical but supportive approach to the hopes the integration with European economic and cultural union may bring - may become a key legitimising tool and ally of the Polish integration attempts and, again, a social stability factor.

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January 1999

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