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Following the 1945 suspension of the concordat signed twenty years earlier, the relations between Poland and the Holy See could only be described as difficult. On the one hand, Warsaw strongly resented not only the Vatican's refusal to recognize the communist government in Poland but also the new Polish church administration established on the former German territories transferred to Poland on the basis of the Potsdam agreement. On the other hand, there was the pro-German attitude of Pope Pius XII and his basic lack of understanding of the difficult position of the church under communist rule. The first formal attempt to re-establish diplomatic relations took place in the late 1960s but then it took another twenty years, the downfall of the communist regime and the election of Cardinal Wojtyla of Krakow to be the new Pope, John Paul II, for the logjam to be broken. Following the re-establishment of diplomatic relations in the summer of 1989, it took another four years for a concordat to be signed in the summer of 1993. The latter proved most controversial and the chances of its being ratified appear highly uncertain. Should it be ratified, the image and popularity of the church would suffer in the long run.

While the relations between Poland and the Holy See can be traced back to the middle ages, their modern version began in 1925 with a signing of a concordat which determined the relationship between Warsaw and the Vatican for the remainder of the interwar period. Among the 27 articles which constituted the concordat, four deserved special attention. Article 9 stated that no part of the Polish Republic could be put under the jurisdiction of a bishop residing outside the territory of the Polish state. Article 11 granted the President of the Republic a veto power with respect to the candidacy of archbishops and bishops nominated by the Pope. According to article 12, prior to the assumption of their functions, all bishops must take an oath of allegiance to the Polish Republic, and a government guarantee of compulsory religious education in elementary and high schools formed the core of article 13.

The record shows that despite the concordat, which in just about every respect strengthened the already privileged position of the church, the relations between the latter and the Polish government did not develop smoothly and the same was true for the interaction between Warsaw and the Vatican. The Polish episcopate attempted to emphasize its total independence from the state while the pro-German attitude of Pope Pius XII automatically precluded any improvement in diplomatic relations between Poland and the Holy See.

The outbreak of the war only increased the existing alienation. This is not the place to discuss the Vatican policy during World War II but there is little doubt that the Pope did precious little to protest the harshness of the German occupation of Poland, and some of his
personal appointments were bound to alienate Polish catholics. Therefore, it is not surprising that in September 1945 the Council of Ministers in Warsaw stated that it considered the 1925 concordat null and void, blaming the Vatican for unilaterally breaking it by violating article 9 that prohibited the Pope from putting Polish territory under the control of bishops residing outside of it.3

Even today that decision is subject to controversy as some constitutional lawyers view it as invalid: since the ratification of the concordat required an act of parliament, a simply resolution of the council of ministers was constitutionally insufficient to declare the concordat invalid. Another act of parliament was necessary for that purpose and it never came. Other experts claim that the decision of the Polish government was correct and that, indeed, the Vatican was solely to blame for violating the agreement.4

One may speculate that the real reason for the suspension of the concordat was in retaliation for the Vatican's nonrecognition of the communist-dominated government which by that time was recognized by all the major states around the world. The record shows, however, that despite the above suspension, the Warsaw government hoped to restore diplomatic relations in the near future, as illustrated by the secret negotiations in Rome between a special emissary of the communist president, Boleslaw Bierut, and the Vatican’s under-secretary of state "for special tasks", Monsignor Domenico Tardini.5 The talks were apparently making progress until they were suddenly interrupted by a special message from the Pope to the German expellees from Poland, sent in March 1948, the warm tone of which angered the Poles who had been waiting in vain for a long time for a similar message from the Holy See, expressing sympathy with their own plight.

The Polish government saw the message as an example of a double standard practiced by the Vatican curia, which was also applied to the ticklish issue of the Polish church administration in former German territories incorporated into Poland on the basis of the Potsdam agreement. This is not the place to discuss this complex issue; suffices it to say that it was not until 1972, or 27 years after the fact, that the Vatican finally recognized the new dioceses which formed the Polish church administration. This, more than anything else, was responsible for further deterioration in the relations between Poland and the Holy See and, unwittingly, may have contributed to some growth in the popularity of the communist regime which was seen in this particular context as a defender of Poland’s vital national interest.

There were also other irritants. One of them was the 1949 message from the Vatican threatening excommunication to those Catholics who maintained relations with the communists. Another one was a negative reaction of the Roman curia to the April 1950 church-state agreement, which the Vatican viewed as the Polish church’s surrender to the communists.
Finally, from the Vatican's point of view, the 1953 imprisonment of Primate Stefan Wyszynski precluded any chances of a rapprochement.

Despite the bloodless Polish upheaval of October 1956, which led to the freeing of the Primate and to a significant albeit temporary improvement in church-state relations, it was not until 1966 that the first official contact between Poland and the Holy See took place in the form of an informal visit to Warsaw of the papal emissary, Monsignor Agostino Casaroli, who came ostensibly to discuss the visit of the new Pope, Paul VI to the holy shrine of Czestochowa in December 1966. Although the papal visit did not take place, Casaroli’s visit apparently reflected the desire of both sides to start a new chapter in the relationship. The Polish leader, Władysław Gomułka, had just come out of a bruising battle with the episcopate on the occasion of the 1000th anniversary of the Polish state and most likely welcomed the visit as a means of enhancing the government’s stature vis-a-vis the church. With regard to the Vatican, the trip reflected Paul’s VI determination to continue the policy initiated by his predecessor, John XXIII, to let bygones be bygones and to improve relations with the communist countries.

The only individual who looked with suspicion at the budding relationship was the Primate Wyszynski, who was worried that the Polish church might be left out of the future talks between the government and the Vatican. There were some signs that in their eagerness to normalize the relations, both the Roman curia and the communist regime in Warsaw might try to reach an agreement over the heads of the Polish church. There is evidence that Wyszynski was strongly disliked by the Polish leadership and was not particularly popular in the Vatican, which resented his ultraconservative stance displayed during the Vatican council. Nonetheless, Wyszynski dug his heels in and ultimately won the battle so that the Polish church hierarchy became in time a full fledged participant in all the subsequent negotiations.

The negotiations continued at a slow pace and the real breakthrough did not occur until the 1978 election of the Archbishop of Krakow, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, to be the new Pope, John Paul II. The Pope’s visits to his homeland in 1979, 1983 and 1987 obviously had a major impact on the negotiations, as did the Pope’s relatively restrained reaction to the imposition of martial law in 1981, and General Jaruzelski’s visit to the Holy See in 1987. One of the results of the increased contacts was an announcement on July 13, 1989, that diplomatic relations between Poland and the Vatican were being re-established as of that date.

While the choice of the new Polish ambassador to the Holy See caused no surprise, the selection of the Papal nuncio raised many eyebrows. The nuncio, Archbishop Józef Kowalczyk, was a Polish priest who had lived in Rome since 1965 and had served as a high ranking member of the apparat of the curia for 20 years. The appointment of a Polish national
as a nuncio to Poland was unprecedented and widely resented by the Poles. While the reasons behind this particular appointment remain obscure, it may be speculated that the Pope, himself a native of Poland, was particularly concerned with the situation in his own country and wanted to appoint someone familiar with the state of affairs in Poland, whom he could trust and who did not have to go through a lengthy learning process.

The development of friendly relations between Poland and the Vatican was interrupted in the mid-1980s by an incident which came close to causing major friction between the Polish episcopate and the Holy See. It began with the Polish Carmelite nuns deciding to build a prayer house next to the old Nazi death camp of Oswiecim (Auschwitz). The decision, taken with the permission of the local authorities, was strongly resented by Jewish religious leaders, especially in the United States, who saw it as an unwarranted intrusion of Catholics into what they had long considered almost as a Jewish holy place. The conflict, which could have been settled easily at an early stage, escalated into a major battle of wills, full of nasty accusations and counteraccusations. At some point, the church used its heaviest gun in the person of the Primate Glemp who came close to ringing the bell of antisemitism with which the Polish church has been identified for a long time.

The conflict proved a major embarrassment for the Holy See which at that time was trying to improve its public image and to build bridges to the Jews. After several unsuccessful attempts to have the issue resolved, the Vatican itself was forced to use its authority and persuaded the nuns to move their house a safe distance from the camp. The incident left a bad taste on both sides of the dispute. The Polish church’s image was clearly tarnished, and while the dispute was ultimately settled, the church and its leader, Glemp, were viewed not only as antisemitic but also as parochial and backward, obviously having failed to internalize the spirit of the Vatican Council.

While this ugly conflict was escalating, further negotiations between Poland and the Holy See were taking place. Even prior to the formal resumption of diplomatic relations, the government-church Joint Commission prepared a text of a convention between Poland and the Vatican, which was ultimately sent to Rome for approval. More than three years later, it was announced that the Pope had rejected the draft of the convention and instead presented a draft of a concordat, prepared by the curia. That draft became an object of a discussion within a commission composed of the government and church officials, and two years later, on July 28, 1993, the mutually agreed text of the concordat was signed by the Polish foreign minister and the Papal nuncio.

The signing of the concordat initiated a public debate between the supporters and the opponents of the treaty, unprecedented in its ferocity. On the one side, there was, of course,
the church hierarchy aided by those politicians who negotiated the agreement and by a handful of Catholic scholars. Lined up against them were the left-of-center parties, represented in the Sejm, which sooner or later would have to ratify or reject the concordat. What follows is a summary of the main arguments:\^13

One of the major criticisms concerned the necessity of a formal concordat, especially in the period after the Second Vatican Council which, in the eyes of the opposition, removed the need for it. It was pointed out that not only could the re-establishment of diplomatic relations have been supplemented by a simple convention between Poland and the Holy See, but also that few if any countries around the world were willing to conclude a concordat, which was unnecessary.\^14 There were also complaints (a) that the government of Prime Minister Hanna Suchocka had no right to sign the treaty, having just lost a vote of no confidence in the Sejm, which itself was subsequently dissolved, (b) that the negotiations were conducted in a great hurry, and (c) that they were shrouded in secrecy instead of having the proposed draft an object of an open debate.\^15 There was also a feeling that the agreement was negotiated not by the Vatican—which had been traditionally the case in past negotiations—but by the Polish church: except for the nuncio, himself a Pole, there was not a single representative of the Roman curia in the church delegation. Finally, other non-Catholic Christian denominations felt that the concordat offered privileges to the Catholics which were denied to other religions, thus violating the spirit of ecumenism emphasized by Vatican II.

The most serious accusation focused on the fact that in several of its provisions the concordat openly violated the Polish constitution, and that it therefore had to be renegotiated.\^16 This was particularly true in giving precedence to church over civil marriages and in several other provisions. The supporters of the treaty rejected most of the criticisms as trivial and inconsequential. They believed that the concordat did not violate the constitution and that international treaties nearly always necessitated changes in the existing legislation.

Gradually, the tempers in the debate began to rise. This was particularly true for the church whose leaders clearly began to worry about the parliamentary ratification of the agreement. Not surprisingly, the two most outspoken supporters of the concordat, Primate Glemp and Bishop Orszulik, began to lose their tempers and some of their arguments served only to create further friction.\^17 The church itself was divided on the issue: although it was loath to admit it, many of the accusations hit the target and even Bishop Pieronek, the newly elected Secretary of the Episcopate, had to admit that perhaps some of the provisions of the concordat would have to be renegotiated.\^18

The situation on the political side of the debate was unclear. The September 1993 elections produced a new, left-of-center coalition government. Of the two coalition partners,
the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), formed on the ruins of the old communist party, made no bones about its opposition to the concordat and in its election campaign promised to vote against it. The Polish Peasant Party (PSL), probably the only truly class party in Poland, representing the traditionally religious peasants, hesitated for a while but recently came out in favor of the concordat. The other leftist party, the Union of Labor (UP), which attracted many of the former communists, was from the beginning strongly opposed to the treaty. The two smaller right-of-center parties were on record as favoring the agreement and the Democratic Union (recently renamed the Freedom Union or UW) appears divided on the issue. President Walesa has strongly endorsed the concordat, but in light of his rapidly waning popularity, his support is not likely to have much of an impact. According to public opinion surveys, the general population remains largely indifferent on the issue.

At the time of this writing (beginning of June 1994) it appears that the Sejm debate on the ratification of the concordat is about to take place. The Democratic Left Alliance tried to have the ratification process postponed until after the passage of the new constitution but at some point decided that it might not have enough votes to win, and the government decided to have the treaty discussed in the parliament prior to the new constitution. In April 1994, the leadership of SLD announced that its parliamentary party would vote against ratification, and a few weeks later its coalition partner, the PSL, declared that it would support the concordat. Thus, with the coalition split on the issue, the outcome of the ratification vote is uncertain: the Left is likely to vote no, the Right will most probably say yes, and the center will most likely split.

The episcopate and its supporters appear to be much less confident about the passage of the concordat than earlier on, and the tone of its public utterances on the subject have become increasingly emotional. Both Glemp and Orszulik, in particular, began to talk about an "international scandal," continued to invoke the image of the beloved Polish Pope, and altogether sounded like the church of the past talking about a sinister conspiracy determined to defeat the treaty.

Although the result of the vote remains uncertain, it is not inconceivable that the concordat will be ratified by a very small majority. Remembering its defeats in previous battles with the church, even the Left is hesitant to challenge it head on, fearing that it may lose again. Moreover, as pointed out earlier, the general public seems to be indifferent about the outcome. Thus, it may be speculated that when the final vote is up, the opposition and especially the Democratic Left Alliance will abstain from voting and the concordat will be approved by a majority of the Sejm.
The church’s victory may again prove to be a Pyrrhic one. While the episcopate may gloat about its success, the concordat may further add to the existing polarization and further contribute to the growing estrangement of the public from the church. Hence, while the church may emerge as a winner in the short run, its long run image and popularity would be bound to suffer.

NOTES


3. There is by now a considerable literature on the 1945 decision to suspend the concordat. For a sample, see Jan Zaryn, "Jak zerwanmo konkordat tajemnice roku 1945," *Lad-Dodatek Historyczny*, April 1994.


8. In addition to directing the Polish section of the Vatican’s Secretariat of State, Kowalczyk was appointed as the editor of Pope John Paul’s II collected works. Adam Boniecki, "Kim jest nuncjusz?" *Tygodnik Powszechny*, September 17, 1989.


10. For details, see *Tygodnik Powszechny*, October 1, 1989.


14. A significant exception was the concordat between Italy and the Holy See, signed in 1984. Opponents of the Polish concordat often cite it as a model that Poland should have adopted in 1993.
15. For a good summary of the debate, see Zbigniew Nosowski, "Nie było wielkiej wojny," Wiez, vol. XXXVI, no. 10, October 1993, pp. 34-52.


17. See, for example, Glemp's statement of January 6, 1994, Tygodnik Powszechny, January 16, 1994.


II. CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS IN POLAND AFTER SOLIDARITY AND MARTIAL LAW

ANDRZEJ KORBONSKI

In the 1980s, the rapprochement between the church and the state, initiated earlier by Primate Stefan Wyszynski and party leader, Edward Gierek, continued unabated despite the trauma of martial law imposed in December 1981. Both the church and the state had new leaders: Archbishop, later cardinal, Jozef Glemp replaced the deceased Wyszynski; and General Wojciech Jaruzelski, who assumed top political power in the country. Both of them were determined to maintain good relations between the two institutions. Primate Glemp, in particular, was eager to cooperate with the government, even at the risk of antagonizing the junior clergy and the faithful. In this he was helped by the new Pope, John Paul II, and the Holy See, which was moving rapidly in the direction of re-establishing diplomatic relations between Poland and the Vatican. At the end of the decade, the church’s relative position became stronger than that of the communist regime, forcing the latter to begin the Round Table dialogue with the opposition.

The two most important events in the context of church-state relations in Poland in the late 1970s were the 1978 totally unexpected election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, the Archbishop of Krakow, to be the new pope, John Paul II, and his subsequent triumphant visit to Poland in the summer of 1979. The period also witnessed a considerable progress on the road to re-establishing diplomatic relations with the Vatican, which were bound to augur a new era in the relations between communist Poland and the Catholic church.

The election of Wojtyla caused great surprise, especially in Poland. The cardinal himself advanced rather rapidly in the Polish church hierarchy but there was little in his record that suggested papacy. His personality was in sharp contrast to that of the Primate Wyszynski: whereas the latter appeared often imperious, conservative and distant, the former was clearly a "people’s priest," who thrived on direct contacts with the faithful and became greatly popular with the masses. The record shows that Wojtyla was particularly close to the youth and, within permissible limits, supportive of the dissidents, which Wyszynski was not. There was some evidence that the communist leadership was trying to drive a wedge between the two cardinals but whatever Wojtyla may have thought of Wyszynski’s conservative policies, he remained utterly loyal to the Primate until his own elevation to the papacy.

There is little doubt that the Pope’s visit to Poland contributed to the birth of Solidarity a year later, for at least two reasons. First, the mass outpouring of people who followed his every step yet remained orderly and obedient not so much to the police but rather to the church-appointed guards, had a twofold effect: it showed not only the sheer physical strength of the masses that could be mobilized for a cause--not necessarily by the communists--but also that the
throng could obey orders and follow directions of their leaders, if they perceived them as legitimate. Thus, in a way, the Pope’s tour of Poland in the summer of 1979 was a dress rehearsal for the series of strikes throughout the country a year later that culminated in the birth of Solidarity on the Baltic coast in late August 1980.

The visit also reflected the growing weakness of the communist regime. Deep down, even the nomenklatura must have been pleased with the election of a Polish Pope; however, a personal visit by the Pontiff was another matter. The government hesitated but ultimately could neither resist the pressure of the workers and the intellectuals whose alliance was growing stronger from year to year, nor oppose the demands of the church with which it tried to maintain good relations at a time when its own political fate was in doubt.

Interestingly enough, the church’s involvement in the negotiations between the government and the workers in Gdansk in August 1980 was marginal, except for the participation of the local clergy which actively supported the striking workers. The highly publicized sermon by Primate Wyszynski at the Holy Shrine of Czestochowa on August 26, urged the workers to go back to work at a critical juncture in the negotiations, and as such it was both strongly resented and largely ignored by the strikers.

The reason behind the highly conciliatory tone of Wyszynski’s sermon is not clear to this day but it must be kept in mind that at that time the Primate was almost eighty and in poor health (he was to die less than a year later). Throughout most of his tenure as the undisputed leader of the Polish church he had led the fight to ensure the survival of the church against communist attacks, and only in the second half of the 1970s did he succeed in establishing almost cordial relations with his communist counterpart, Edward Gierek. Moreover, he also witnessed a rapprochement between the Polish communists and the Holy See, which was bound, sooner or later, to lead to the re-establishment of formal diplomatic relations. He lived to see his junior colleague, Cardinal Wojtyla, being elevated to papacy, and two years later he was his host during the first memorable visit of the Pope to Poland in 1979. It could then be said that in the summer of 1980 Wyszynski emerged as a clear winner in the long struggle against the communists, having achieved most of his objectives.

And now, in the face of the workers’ revolt, his achievements were being seriously threatened and in danger of unravelling. On the one hand, there was the long shadow of the Soviet Union which, he could have argued, invaded Hungary and Czechoslovakia without much hesitation, and could do it again. In addition to the potential losses suffered by the church as a result of the Soviet entry, Wyszynski, who remembered well World War II and was most conscious of the heavy losses suffered by Poland, was determined to prevent a repetition of a similar disaster and was hoping that his voice would have a calming effect on the striking workers.
Moreover, as mentioned in the "Background Paper," there was really no love lost between the Primate and the dissident movement recruited primarily from among the intellectuals, that surfaced in the mid-1980s. The record shows that Wyszynski distrusted the intellectuals and considered them anti-church. Being also a convinced nationalist, he was less than happy with the presence of several well-known Jewish intellectuals among the dissidents, and, altogether, worried about their influencing the workers in a radical, undesirable direction. Needless to say, he most likely hated the idea of his life's work damaged if not destroyed by individuals who were essentially alien to him. By hindsight, Wyszynski clearly underestimated the determination of the workers to reach their goals—the same mistake, by the way, was made by the communists.

Between September 1980 and December 1981, which marked the imposition of martial law, the attitude of the church toward Solidarity warmed up somewhat, but it was clear that the church hierarchy continued being resentful of Solidarity preempting the leadership of anti-communist opposition that until then has been largely monopolized by the church. To be sure, the episcopate attempted to mediate between the regime and Solidarity in a number of local conflicts, and it also endorsed strongly the creation of "Rural Solidarity" in the spring of 1981, but it may be argued that especially in the latter case the church felt obliged to lend its support to the peasants who traditionally had been its strongest followers.

Primate Wyszynski's death in May 1981, and his replacement by Bishop Jozef Glemp, did not change matters greatly. In fact, the election of Glemp to the primacy created considerable surprise. Not much has been known about him except for the fact that for twelve years or so he was Wyszynski's secretary-cum-father confessor, before being appointed in 1979 the Bishop of Warmia in Northern Poland. According to well-informed sources, the Pope had another candidate in mind but could not refuse the wish of dying Wyszynski who recommended Glemp.

It was clearly not a happy choice. Obviously, few if any candidates could have filled Wyszynski's shoes: after all, the Primate's powerful personality dominated the Polish church for thirty three years. Still, Glemp had not distinguished himself in any particular way prior to his selection, and his policy and behavior since 1981 suggested a person of small ability, limited horizon, and considerable stubbornness and narrow mindedness, who on top of that, because of his personality, never managed to generate much warmth and gain overwhelming support among the Polish clergy.

As the political situation in Poland in the second half of 1981 moved inexorably toward a violent confrontation between the communist government and Solidarity, the church leadership did not appear to be actively engaged in trying to defuse the conflict. Glemp met personally with Solidarity's leader, Lech Walesa, and also celebrated a mass at the first Solidarity national congress in October 1981, which could be interpreted as giving official church imprimatur to Solidarity's activities and program. The Primate also took part in the tripartite negotiations
involving also General Jaruzelski and Walesa shortly before the imposition of martial law, and apparently warned Solidarity against going too far. But beyond that there is no evidence of the church trying very hard to help engineer an agreement between the government and the workers.

Glemp was among the first individuals in Poland to be notified officially about the imposition of martial law on December 13, 1981, which manifested the government’s strong desire to persuade the church not to take the workers’ side in the conflict that was to last for the next eight years. There is little doubt that the Jaruzelski regime largely succeeded in that endeavor.

Altogether, and especially the first half of the 1980s, witnessed an excessively cautious policy on the part of the bishops, which some observers might characterize as cowardly. Keeping in mind the highly centralized structure of the church, the key player was obviously Glemp whose behavior at that time could hardly qualify him as a staunch defender of human and civil rights, but who may be regarded by future historians as one who had strengthened the institutional foundations of the church and made it an equal partner of the military junta.

After the imposition of martial law, Glemp did just about everything possible not to antagonize the Jaruzelski regime, and to establish a good working relationship with the generals. He generally adopted a highly deferential stance toward the government’s domestic and foreign policies and showed little support for Solidarity both before and after its formal dissolution. On the contrary, the cardinal engaged in gratuitous criticism of Solidarity during his frequent trips abroad, as illustrated by his newspaper interview in Brazil. Even though Glemp was fond of reminding his critics that the church’s sole concern was with spiritual matters, he did not hesitate to enter into a controversial political fray by urging the Polish actors to end their boycott of the state television network and to return to work. How much influence Primate Glemp had in arranging the second visit of John Paul II to Poland in 1983, is not clear. What is clear is that the visit was not a great success, especially when compared with the Pontiff’s trip in 1979, and that its main accomplishment was the granting of the papal approval to the military regime.

In the meantime, the church-state symbiosis was becoming closer. One of its manifestations was the revival, after an interval of thirteen years, of the old church-government Joint Commission which was to meet more than fifty times between 1980 and 1989. The secret minutes of the Commission’s meetings, which were published in 1993, provide an excellent testimony to the cozy, almost cordial relationship that gradually developed between the high ranking nomenklatura members and equally high members of the Polish episcopate. In the same period there were eleven meetings between Primate Glemp and General Jaruzelski. At the same time the contacts between the government and the Holy See were becoming closer and it was only a matter of time before formal diplomatic relations were to be re-established between Warsaw and the Vatican.

In light of the above, it is not surprising that at some point a major split began to develop within the church hierarchy. The conflict between the higher and lower clergy did not originate
in the 1980s but had its roots in the mid-1970s which saw the emergence of organized political opposition in the country. It soon became clear that Primate Wyszynski and the majority of the episcopate were against the church’s involvement in anti-government activities at a time when the church-state relations were improving. This passive stance was increasingly resented by the junior clergy which, in contrast to their elders, was, as a rule, better educated and politically more conscious.

The rift within the clergy continued to grow after Wyszynski’s death and it escalated after the imposition of martial law. Gradually, the church began to be divided between two groups: a group around Primate Glemp, consisting mostly of the bishops and senior clergy, and another group, composed of junior priests. The former apparently believed that the chief task of the church was to preserve the status quo, which was proving beneficial to the church’s interests. In their eyes, any attempt to expand the church’s sphere of influence was bound to antagonize the government which would then turn once again against the church and deprive it of its hard won gains. The cautious behavior of the senior clergy presumably reflected its perception of the church as a weak institution, a besieged fortress still at the mercy of the regime.

In contrast, the junior clergy believed that the church was strong and that the government needed the church’s cooperation more than the church needed the regime. It deplored the cautious and passive behavior of its superiors which, it felt, played directly into the hands of the government and legitimized its restrictive policies. While the traditional church discipline had largely prevented the conflict from coming into the open, there were enough indications that the split was a serious one, tearing at the fabric of the church.\(^{11}\)

The best known case which symbolized the opposition of the junior clergy was that of Reverend Jerzy Popieluszko, a young parish priest in Warsaw. His brutal 1984 assassination by the secret police was a watershed event in Poland, forcing the Jaruzelski regime to bring his killers to trial and to downgrade and reform the secret police apparat.\(^{12}\) Both the killing and the trial created a great sensation in the country, but here again the reaction of the church hierarchy was relatively subdued, possibly because Popieluszko has been a thorn in Glemp’s side for a long time.

To conclude this part of the narrative, it is clear that throughout the 1980s, the Polish church, and particularly its leadership, was hardly in the forefront of the struggle which ultimately culminated in the Round Table negotiations of 1989. To be sure, there were many members of the clergy who supported Solidarity and were active in providing spiritual and material help to the thousands interned after the imposition of martial law. In general, however, the church remained cautious and passive, much more interested in consolidating its gains than in pushing for more liberty and freedom.
NOTES

1. Even Primate Wyszynski, when asked about Wojtyla's chances, stated that he "had not a chance, he was not well known and was much too young." Franz Cardinal, Koenig, "Prymas Wyszynski jakim go znałem," Tygodnik Powszechny, June 7, 1992.

2. I was told in Warsaw in September 1980 that the decisive vote in favor of the Pope's visit was cast by Stanislaw Kania, the Central Committee secretary in charge of the military, police and church affairs, who a year later was to take over from Gierek as the leader of the Polish party.


5. Personal interviews, Warsaw, October 1993.

6. In the evening of December 13, Glemp delivered a sermon in Warsaw, cautioning against armed resistance and bloodshed. Two days later, the so-called Main Commission, the governing body of the Polish episcopate, issued a statement expressing the hope that despite martial law democratic reforms would continue. The statement was to be read in all the Polish churches on Sunday, December 20, but was withdrawn on Glemp's orders. Roman Graczyk, "Prymas w trudnych czasach," Gazeta Wyborcza, March 12-13, 1994.


10. In addition to his visits in 1979 and 1983, the Pope visited Poland also in June 1987. General Jaruzelski was received in the Vatican on January 13, 1987.


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In the second half of the 1980s, church-state relations in Poland could be described as relatively friendly. The reason for that was that both sides needed each other. The state saw the church as an intermediary between itself and the Solidarity opposition, and the church hierarchy realized that it needed to maintain good relations with the communists to achieve its major objectives. The Round Table negotiations, which began in February 1989, with the aim to arrange for a sharing of power in the country, were greatly facilitated by the intervention of the church. Possibly as a reward, in the course of 1989 the church achieved its two major objectives: a law passed in May which re-defined the church-state relationship; and the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the Holy See, which took place in July. Following the victory of Solidarity in the June 1989 elections, the church moved rapidly to reach the apogee of its power, illustrated by its ability to achieve other objectives, such as compulsory religious education and strict anti-abortion legislation. Following these victories the church’s popular standing began to wane and in the 1993 parliamentary elections not a single candidate backed by the church got elected.

It is difficult even today to pinpoint exactly the beginning of the end of communist rule in Poland. There is a general agreement that one of the turning points was the 1985 amnesty granted to leading dissidents awaiting trial. Soon thereafter, the Jaruzelski regime enthusiastically embraced Gorbachev’s perestroika and glasnost, and being reasonably certain of Moscow’s support, continued on its liberal course by staging a referendum on the future of economic reforms, creating an advisory Consultative Council, which managed to attract some prominent non-communist intellectuals and scholars, and improving its foreign relations, especially with the United States and Western Europe.

The church was obviously one of the beneficiaries of this benign policy. The meetings of the government-church Joint Commission continued without interruption, trying to solve various issues and generally preparing the ground for a normalization of church-state relations. The same was true for the working groups in Warsaw and the Vatican, laying the foundations for the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Poland and the Holy See.

In the second half of the 1980s, church-state relations could be described as cozy. This friendly relationship resulted from the fact that both the state and the church needed each other. There can be little doubt that the Jaruzelski regime realized that power was slipping out of its hands and that sooner or later it would be forced to enter into negotiations with Solidarity, which, although illegal, managed to survive underground. It was clear that in order
to persuade Solidarity to participate in the discussions about possible sharing of power. Jaruzelski would need the help of the church which could act as a go-between, acceptable to both sides.

The church also realized that in order to achieve its major objectives, it also needed to maintain good relations with the communists. Two of the church’s principal goals were constitutional guarantees of its autonomous status, and the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the Vatican, which the government also supported. But there were other objectives as well, such as the re-introduction of compulsory religious education, elimination of the permissive abortion laws, and greater access to mass media, as well as more mundane matters, such as construction of new churches and granting of some economic concessions to the clergy.

All these matters were discussed regularly during the meetings of the Joint Commission, which met between September 1980 and January 1989. The government delegation was led by Kazimierz Barcikowski, one of the better known liberals in the communist party politburo, and the key player on the church’s side was Reverend (later Bishop) Alojzy Orszulik, the head of the episcopate’s press office. Orszulik, despite his relatively low rank, was a seasoned negotiator and generally recognized as the eminence grise of the episcopate, who was to play a major role in the Round Table negotiations.

In the spring of 1988, Poland was subjected to a series of strikes in key industries, the first wave of serious labor disturbances since 1980, which resulted in the birth of Solidarity. The government, clearly taken by surprise, had to seek the help of the still illegal Solidarity to quell the unrest, but it was fairly obvious that the achieved truce was only a temporary one. A second wave of strikes erupted in late summer, and this time the government had no choice but to proclaim its readiness to enter into negotiations with Lech Walesa as the leader of Solidarity, negotiations which soon became known as the Round Table.

It took several months before the discussions actually got under way in February 1989. Following the government’s offer to meet with the opposition, the first meeting, including a representative of the church, took place on August 31, 1988 and ended without reaching an agreement. Two weeks later, on September 15, another meeting, attended by Orszulik, broke up because of the government’s refusal to legalize Solidarity, but hope was expressed that there would be other meetings in the future. And indeed, on November 18-19, at the initiative of Archbishop Bronislaw Dabrowski, the secretary of the episcopate, Walesa and General Czeslaw Kiszczak, a close confidant of Jaruzelski, who first suggested the Round Table, met at a church outside of Warsaw, again without success. Finally, on January 4, 1989, it was agreed to meet in secret sessions, again including Orszulik, and this decision ultimately led to the Round Table.
It must be remembered that there was a powerful opposition within the communist party’s central committee to the idea of sitting at the same table with the opposition. The central committee was dominated by conservative apparatchiki and the only way to break down their resistance was for Jaruzelski and Kiszczak to threaten to resign at a contentious two-part plenum of the central committee, unless there was an agreement to hold the Round Table. There was also the question of the composition of the Solidarity delegation, which was objected to by the government, and even within the opposition there was disagreement as to which groups and individuals were to participate.

It was here that the church in the person of Orszulik played a decisive role. Each time it appeared that an impasse was reached and that the Round Table would be scuttled, he and other church leaders managed to save it. It was really a remarkable performance, testifying to the impressive diplomatic skills of Orszulik and others. It was then not surprising that both, the government and Solidarity, invited the church to participate in the Round Table. The church agreed to do so on condition that its representatives, Orszulik and Reverend Bronislaw Dembowski, a well-known Solidarity sympathizer, would simply act as observers and not as full-fledged participants.

Much has been written about the Round Table and its outcome, and there is no need to go over its details once again. The question is raised occasionally whether the historic negotiations would have taken place without the strong support of the church. I am prepared to argue that the intervention of the church was decisive in accelerating the process of negotiations. There is no doubt that an agreement between the government and the opposition would have been reached sooner or later, as witnessed by similar Round Tables in Hungary, Bulgaria and East Germany, where there was no active involvement of the church, but the active participation of the church in Poland speeded up the actual talks. Since the Polish Round Table was the first in a series and served as a model from which other countries could learn, the important contribution of the church extended beyond Poland’s borders.

The church’s idea to participate in the Round Table as an observer was a clever one. At the outset, no one knew how the negotiations would turn out. The church as a neutral observer could claim credit for a victory or easily dissociate itself from a defeat. Since the results of the Round Table have been generally viewed in positive terms, especially after the June 1989 elections which produced a stunning victory for Solidarity, the reputation of the church as an effective power broker was greatly enhanced.

One of the immediate consequences of it was the passage of legislation in May 1989, which did go a long way to regularize the church-state relationship. The fact that the act was ratified by a Sejm (parliament) still dominated by the communists, was in itself remarkable and good testimony to the dramatic change in the status of the church.
Having achieved one of its cherished objectives, the church concentrated on accomplishing the other, namely the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the Holy See. The story of the negotiations leading up to that agreement, signed in July 1989, will be discussed in a forthcoming paper, but the treaty itself was still another victory for the church which, having accomplished its main two tasks, could now turn to other objectives.

The record shows that the church adopted a largely neutral stance during the June 1989 parliamentary elections, possibly because their outcome appeared uncertain till the very last minute and the church did not want to lay its prestige on the line backing a potential loser. Undoubtedly, the church hierarchy must have been pleased with the September 1989 selection of Tadeusz Mazowiecki as the Prime Minister of the first non-communist government in East Central Europe in 45 years. Mazowiecki was a well-known catholic intellectual and although he did not always toe the church’s line, he was clearly preferable to many other opposition candidates.

The church tried to maintain its neutral attitude also during the presidential election campaign of 1990 and entered into the fray only after the stunning defeat of Mazowiecki by the political newcomer and political charlatan, Stanislaw Tyminski, in the first round of the elections. Faced with a choice between Walesa and Tyminski, the episcopate unhesitatingly threw its support behind Walesa who then easily defeated his opponent.

It was during that period also that Poland’s political landscape began to undergo a significant change. The impulse for that came with a breakup of Solidarity which disintegrated into a number of political parties that began to prepare for the next parliamentary elections. While constitutionally the elections themselves were not due for several years, it was fairly obvious that the so-called "contractual" Sejm, elected on the basis of a semi-free franchise, would not last until the end of its term. Not surprisingly, there was a growing debate whether the church, basking in its glory, should not organize its own political party or, at least, give its blessing to a kind of a christian-democratic party found in Italy and, earlier on, in France.

Ultimately, the church decided against it. Possibly, the decision had something to do with the absence of an historical tradition of having a confessional party in the Polish political spectrum. The brief experience of the Labor Party (Unia Pracy) in the interwar and early postwar period did not inspire much confidence. Besides, it may be hypothesized that rather than having a party closely identified with the church, the episcopate preferred to pull the strings from behind without formally endorsing those parties which, for one reason or another, supported the church’s interests. It was part and parcel of the hitherto cautious policy of the church, not willing to risk public disapproval in case one of its favorite policies did not work out.
In the meantime, however, the country witnessed a mass proliferation of parties across the political spectrum. One of the better known was the Christian-National Union (Zjednoczenie Chrześcijańsko-Narodowe or ZChN) which, as its name implied, strongly embraced the traditional christian values and national sentiments. There were other parties which shared similar principles, but ZChN soon became the principal spokesman of the christian right, led by leaders who unabashedly proclaimed themselves in favor of the various policies advocated by the church.

For reasons that are still unclear, on the eve of the first truly free parliamentary elections in October 1991, the church threw caution to the wind and got itself directly involved in the election campaign by organizing a coalition known as the Catholic Electoral Action (Katolicka Akcja Wyborcza or KAW) which openly supported ZChN and its allies. The church's involvement was quite formidable: the church used its powerful institutional network and its mass media essentially to tell the voters how to vote. During Sunday masses priests would give detailed instructions to their parishioners and the churches were freely used to display campaign literature of parties favored by the episcopate.

The church's campaign proved remarkably successful. Although parties endorsed by the Catholic Electoral Action did not achieve majority in the newly elected Sejm, they gained enough seats in the highly fragmented assembly to become an attractive partner in any coalition government. The ZChN leader became the Speaker of the Sejm and its leading members joined the coalition governments of Jan Olszewski and Hanna Suchocka, which ruled the country until September 1993. Their presence was responsible for the passage of the highly controversial legislation strongly backed by the church, dealing with religious instruction in schools, radical anti-abortion policies and imposition of vaguely defined christian values on mass media. The signing of the concordat with the Holy See in the summer of 1993 was another of the church's victories.

There is no doubt that the years 1991-1993 represented the years of the church's greatest triumph. Its victories were unprecedented and pushed Poland well along the road to becoming a confessional state, helped by unscrupulous politicians who, by proclaiming themselves catholics used the church instrumentally to achieve their parties' goals. Only in Ireland could the catholic church claim to have more influence and power. However, it soon became apparent that the church's victory was a Pyrrhic one. Gradually, the excessive nature of the church's demands, its shrill pronouncements, and open interference in politics, began to generate, first, resentment, and then opposition even among the circles and groups recognized as generally sympathetic to the church's goals. It was a classic case of arrogance of power and, inevitably, the church's popularity began to drop rapidly in the public opinion polls.
In time, the church leadership concluded that its ambitions had gone too far. There was a major reshuffle at the top of the episcopate and its secretary, the previously mentioned Bishop Orszulik, identified with the hard uncompromising line, was replaced by Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek, a representative of the younger generation, who realized that something needed to be done to stop the drop in the popular perception of the church. One of the most visible changes introduced by the new leadership was an unmistakable withdrawal of the church from direct political involvement, best illustrated by the adoption of an essentially neutral stance during the Sejm elections in September 1993.

In sharp contrast to the 1991 elections, the church simply asked the faithful to vote without endorsing a single political party and the only exception to that was a rather feeble sponsorship by the Archbishop of Gdansk of a loosely structured catholic electoral alliance known as "Fatherland" (Ojczyzna) which included ZChN. The endorsement proved highly controversial and may have contributed to the defeat of the alliance which failed to gain a single seat in the new Sejm.

As is well known, the assembly elected last September is dominated by a left-of-center coalition of the Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej or SLD) and the Polish Peasant Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe or PSL) Only two small parties openly support the church and in the election post-mortem there was some criticism of the church for adopting a neutral stance and not becoming directly involved in the election campaign.

I am prepared to argue that the criticism was unwarranted and that the caution exercised by the church was strategically correct. All evidence points to the fact that as recently as the spring of 1993 the church was in danger of losing whatever public support it had left after its spectacular albeit controversial victories mentioned above, and that it had to lower its profile to regain its popularity. Moreover, the popular mood on the eve of the elections was such that even a strong church endorsement of its favorite parties would not have prevented a leftist victory. Finally, there is also considerable evidence that the left-of-center parties are not as antagonistic to the church as assumed. While there may be some amendments to the harsh anti-abortion legislation and while the ratification of the concordat may be postponed, the church is not going to lose the various official gains it had acquired in the last few years.
NOTES


2. "Ponad podzialami" (interview with Bishop Orszulik), Przeglad Tygodniowy, July 8, 1990.


4. According to some Polish observers, this was a major error stemming from the fact that Primate Glemp, the head of the Polish church, seriously underestimated the importance of the Round Table. Andrzej Micewski, Katolicy w potrzasku (Warszawa: BGW, 1993), p. 130.

5. For an account of the church’s efforts to influence the elections, see Anna Sabbat-Swidlicka, "Primate Plays Host to Political Meeting," RFE/RL Report on Eastern Europe, no. 39, September 28, 1990.

6. The most widely cited example is a statement by one of the ZChn leaders who said that he "did not care whether Poland was rich or poor as long as it was catholic." Personal interviews, Warsaw, September 1993.


9. In early 1992, over 70% of the respondents in a public opinion survey, conducted by the well-known Center for the Study of Public Opinion (CBOS), felt that the church exercised too much influence on public affairs. It was the only institution to be so judged in contrast to, for example, the central and local government, the state ombudsman, and the police, seen as having insufficient power. Gazeta Wyborcza, February 5, 1992. About 60% of the respondents in another survey believed that the church had too much influence over the mass media. ibid., April 10, 1992. Two years later, still another survey indicated that 64% of the respondents felt that the church’s influence on politics was too great. Zycie Warszawy, March 2, 1994.