

The Church in Poland: Less Tension

By FLOYD ANDERSON
(NC News Service)

Warsaw — Many people here are convinced that Catholic Church-state relationships in Poland are probably better than they have been in a couple of years. A prime evidence of this is the granting of a passport to Stefan Cardinal Wyszynski, Primate of Poland, for his visit to Rome. And, I am told, there are several other indications.

Suddenly it is not quite as difficult to get a permit to construct a new church; it is not as difficult to get a permit for public processions on holy days, etc. In fact, one man told of a Corpus Christi procession in a village outside Warsaw where the militia were even directing traffic, telling people where to park, so they could take part in the religious procession.

Whether this easing will last is, of course, an open question. Even more intriguing is the reason for the change; and here, naturally, it is pure speculation, based, however, in some fairly good probabilities.

First, I am told, one must understand that Cardinal Wyszynski and Wladyslaw Gomulka, first secretary of the Polish United Workers party and thus head of the government, are "two hard-headed, hard-nosed personalities."

Both are strong men, without any question, firmly committed to their principles and their beliefs — and in Poland, they have been pitted against each other.

The change in attitude toward the Church, it is believed, dates primarily back to the political campaign within the Communist party here.

The ex-head of the secret police was trying to ease-out the Gomulka group and in doing so, I was told, was seeking the aid of the Catholic Church.

However, Cardinal Wyszynski and the Church stayed out of the political in-fighting. One man remarked as in any country in the Communist bloc, it is very difficult to trust an ex-secret police chief.

As a consequence of this, it is believed, Cardinal Wyszynski aided the in-group, Gomulka and his supporters.

And people think that Gomulka came to realize this — that, even though the two men are diametrically opposed in principles and beliefs, Cardinal Wyszynski had done him a favor. And, in return, some of the restrictions on the Church have been lessened.

It is said that more travel permits have been granted for priests to go abroad, and for foreign priests to go to Poland. One man said he felt there had been more American priests traveling around the country than in previous years.

But the Communist regime has not given up. For instance, it recently gave considerable publicity to what is believed to be the first civil "christening" of a child in a civil registry office. The civil authorities bestowed the name on the child in a completely civil ceremony — and quite a point was made of this.

The same thing is true of marriage — efforts continue to make more of the civil signing of the registry book, to try to get marriage ceremonies out of the church, just as they are renewing efforts to make Baptism a civil ceremony.

There has been a little improvement on the situation of seminarians in the Army. Cardinal Wyszynski got the authorities to agree to set-up a special military camp for seminarians to prevent exposing them to some of what were called the "earthly evils" of military life.

The young people of Poland seem to be as interested in religion as their parents. The feeling generally was that what might be lacking in quantity, is more than made up in quality. The young people who stick to the faith are really determined and devout Catholics.

The churches remain crowded for Sunday Masses; and as you walk about Warsaw you see people going into churches at all times of the day and early evening. Some churches in Poland will have perhaps 10 or 11 Masses on a Sunday; some are so overcrowded they have benches and chairs in the courtyard for the overflow — and people sitting there, with the doors of the church wide open in the freezing winter weather.

But all is not peaceful and quiet for the Church. At the fifth party congress concluded on Nov. 16, some speeches referred to what were called the right wing elements within the episcopate in Poland. But observers felt the references to the Church were comparatively mild.

Further distrust and hatred of West Germany is something that drives some of these people to extremes. They have not forgotten the letter of the Polish bishops to the German bishops some years ago; many consider this in a sense almost as if the Polish bishops were trying to sell out Poland to Germany. And, I was told, that is absolutely unthink-

able in the mind of any Pole from the youngest child upward.

This hatred of Germany seems to be inculcated in every child. Again this year, as on a previous visit, in Old Town market square (Rynek Starego Miasta), I saw groups of small children making a tour of Warsaw. And, inevitably, they were headed for the Warsaw Historical Museum, where they would see a 20-minute film depicting the destruction of Warsaw by the German Army. It is a horrible, sobering film — and one can readily imagine the effect it has on the minds of young Polish children.

'Pseudo-Concept' Of Liberty Hit

Vatican City — (RNS) — Pope Paul VI, speaking at his weekly general audience here, urged Catholics to "free their minds from certain pseudo-concepts of liberty."

While he criticized abuses and misconceptions of freedom, the Pope insisted: "We can never be grateful enough to that traditional wisdom of the Catholic Church which has defended in every way this royal gift of freedom, even if it is compromised and complicated or dangerous."

"Modern trends of revolutionary thought sustain and spread a false concept which helps man to lose his own true liberty, to become a slave to his own passions and moral weaknesses," the Pope said. "He who sins is the slave of sin. It is a classic and ever-present phenomenon and today more than ever in the modern emancipation from exterior laws and from the moral laws."



South Vietnamese women, carrying helium-filled balloons with white doves of peace suspended from them, watch a Buddhist procession move through the streets of Saigon. The plea for peace came as crowds observed the march which was conducted to transport a religious relic from a pagoda north of Saigon, through the capital, to a Quang pagoda. (RNS)

Negotiations Needed

Nigeria, Biafra Bishops Agree

Vatican City — (NC) — Six bishops from warring Nigeria and Biafra met in Rome at the summons of Pope Paul VI "to find unity" as one of them put it. They discovered themselves in perfect agreement from the outset of their four-day meeting.

In a statement they declared that a solution to the disastrous dispute could be found "not by war but by sincere negotiations."

These words echoed to the last syllable what the Pope had told them at an audience 90 minutes before.

Nowhere in the Pope's speech was the word Biafra employed. The bishops did not even use the word Nigeria. Both the Pope's speech and the bishops' statement used the terms "ecclesiastical provinces" of Kaduna and Lagos (which cover all of the Nigerian Federation save the former Eastern region, which declared itself independent under the name of Biafra), and Onitsha (which comprise the territory of Biafra, before the advances of federal troops).

The bishops paid tribute to the Pope's "noble efforts" to bring peace and declared that neither the Church nor its organizations have been involved, directly or indirectly, in the present war.

In a clear protest against the mounting opposition — mainly from Nigeria federal government sources — to mercy flights into Biafra, the bishops asserted that charitable organizations, fulfilling the Christian duty of feeding the hungry and clothing the naked "deserve not blame, but praise."

Caritas Internationalis, the international Catholic relief organization, "has served the cause of charity with a magnanimity beyond comparison and without discrimination of people

or religion," the bishops said. They further declared that they themselves "cannot abdicate (their) obligation" to help the needy.

The bishops carefully avoided taking sides in the dispute over whether Nigerian federal leaders aim at genocide, the total destruction of the Ibo tribe that makes up the majority of the population in the Biafran stronghold. The charge has been repeatedly leveled by Biafran leader Brig. Gen. C. Odumegwu Ojukwu and repeatedly denied by federal spokesmen.

The bishops' statement was signed by Archbishop John McCarthy, S.M.A., of Kaduna, John K. A. Aggrey of Lagos and Francis A. Arize of Onitsha, and Bishops Joseph B. Whelan, C.S.S.P., of Owerri, John J. Reddington, S.M.A., of Jos and Owen McCoy, F.A., of Oyo.

Bishop Whelan of Owerri said "We had been cut off from one another so long we did not know what each of us thought. It was hoped that by the end of the meeting we might find unanimity, but we discovered from the very beginning there was unanimity. Nobody can say from now on that there is any division among the bishops of Nigeria, and Biafra. "But before we met we were all extremely apprehensive."

New York — (NC) — Bishop Edward E. Swannstrom, executive director of Catholic Relief Services, said that 300 mercy flights, carrying about 3,000 tons of food and medicines for suffering children, were flown into Biafra during January, by the emergency program conducted by church-relief agencies of Europe and the United States from the island of Sao Tome.

Bishop Swannstrom said this was

the highest total of mercy flights completed during one month since the church agencies combined in April, 1968, to provide relief supplies for the civilian population.

New York — (NC) — A 17-minute black and white film on the emergency program being conducted by international church agencies for the starving people of Biafra is available for interested groups from Catholic Relief Services. It concentrates on the night mercy flights from the island of Sao Tome into Biafra and how the food is distributed throughout the stricken area.

Groups interested in the film can write to: Office of Information, Catholic Relief Services, 350 Fifth Ave., New York, 10001.

POPE

Desire Stressed For Nigeria Peace

Vatican City — (RNS) — Pope Paul VI made an appeal for peace in Nigeria here during a special audience for bishops from the Nigerian ecclesiastical provinces.

The single aspiration of the Church for Nigeria is peace, he insisted in a statement that some interpreters considered an indirect answer to Nigerian charges that the Church relief effort has favored Biafra.

"The Church is one, above every conflict," he said. "The Church loves and is loved above every division. The Church wishes to bring peace and love where there is war and hatred. The Church wishes to aid the suffering."

"It is not for us nor for you to suggest a concrete political plan, but it is our duty and yours to declare solemnly that it is not by war but by sincere negotiations, not in an atmosphere of opposition but in one of open collaboration that the wished-for solution of the baneful controversy will be found."

Following the audience, the bishops issued a statement asserting "the full unity of the Catholic hierarchy of Nigeria" and deploring "the use of religion as an instrument of propaganda by either side of the war."

The bishops' statement paid special tribute to the international Catholic relief agency, Caritas for its "magnificent contribution" to victims of the war on both sides. It also expressed gratitude to the Pope for his many efforts to promote peace in Nigeria.



'Underground' Masses Criticized by Pope Paul

Rome — (NC) — Underground Masses defeat the ideal of Christian unity which should be in the family of God, Pope Paul told members of Italy's diocesan liturgical commissions meeting here this week.

Urging the liturgists to create a "deeper biblical, patristic and spiritual understanding" of liturgical texts and ceremonies, the Holy Father said the liturgy "does not divide but unites, does not set up barriers but joins hearts in prayer and in love."

Turning to "underground worship," he said: "There are cases, more or less underground, which by splitting

up the liturgical celebration among the various categories of the faithful and even in private or private associations, run the risk of losing the spirit of catholicity, the unity in the one faith which cements the Church."

"We refer to the Masses of the Youth, undertakings that are excellent and to be encouraged cordially where they are not inspired polemically against other Masses. They should be far removed from novelties that denature the celebration, weakening it in the rite, in the texts, in the music and in the singing, in the length, in the sermon—all under the pretext of adapting it to the modern mentality."

MEXICO

Bishops Stress Role of Laity

Mexico City — (NC) — While the Mexican bishops conference meeting here covered a wide range of items, a small committee was sharpening the most incisive tool for overall Church renewal.

Working under Bishop Adalberto Almeida of Zacatecas, the Bishops' Committee on Pastoral Social Work streamlined lay Catholic initiative and action to implement in Mexico Pope Paul VI's encyclical, "The Development of Peoples."

Even the leading financial institution of the country, the Banco Nacional de Mexico, is interested in the Church's move to strengthen moves for social and economic advancement. Its monthly economic report devoted two pages to the bishops' pastoral efforts in fostering development values.

In a program approved by the bishops' conference, the committee will point toward goals of development through the liturgy, commun-

ications media, catechetical instruction, education and preaching.

A member of the committee, Bishop Alfonso Sanchez of Papania, said that the first aim is "the internal renewal of the Church, to enable its clergy and laity to perform an efficient task of evangelization and development."

Besides approval of this program, called an "over-all pastoral plan," the bishops' conference restated its full support for Pope Paul's encyclical Humanae Vitae on birth control.

The three-day meeting, at the Missionary Seminary in a suburb of Mexico City, went over reports by committees in such fields as the migration of workers, clergy and seminarians, schools, and the crisis in the lay apostolate.

Describing lay efforts, Father Enrique Mata, S.J., wrote in the Mexico City daily Excelsior:

"Part of the Church crisis today rests with the rebirth of lay responsibility. . . . Now we know well that some Catholic organizations are obsolete and inactive, for they lack goals, leadership, practical methods, and are often under excessive clerical influence. The bishops must tackle this problem, because when a lay person matures, he or she avoids mediocrity only to find the absurd situations in which someone tries to kill their initiative."

The bishops also tried to coordinate Church policies in preserving colonial and baroque art treasures. Several dioceses have embarked on liturgical renewal programs calling for simpler church decorations. In dismantling ornate treasures, they often run counter to government regulations or the feelings of the local congregations.

In Mexico all church facilities are controlled by the state under the confiscation laws of 1857.

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