

# Poland is window on church's future

By Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

It used to be said that if you wanted to know which way the cultural wind was going to blow in the United States, look to California. California offered a preview of coming attractions.

Beatniks, hippies and communes began there. So did "New Age" religion and the cult of self-expression.

Is it possible that what California once was for American culture, Poland may now become for the church in the lesser-developed countries and regions of the world?

Poland is a country emerging from a long period of political repression and economic underdevelopment. Its citizens have not had the luxury of choice in either realm.

Their personal purchases have been determined by availability of goods, not by taste or preference. And their attitudes and opinions about public issues have been limited by the information at hand, which wasn't much.

Several years passed before Polish-language copies of the documents of the Second Vatican Council were available,

and even then their circulation has been extremely limited.

Only through education do people become aware of a wider range of value-systems, of experiences, of resources, and of opinions. Without education, the range of choice is always narrow.

Like education, economic prosperity and political maturation expand our range of choice. Commitments and loyalties are no longer unquestioned or taken for granted.

Those who were buying one soap product simply because it was the only one available might or might not remain loyal to that product once they have a choice of three of four other brands.

If they remain loyal to the original product, it's because they think it better than the others, or its price more reasonable. But, again, they have a choice, and they make it.

The only way traditionalists in business, government and religion can maintain an existing system which happens to work to their own advantage is by keeping their customers, their citizens, or their adherents uneducated.

For to be educated is to be aware of multiple options, and when people are free to

make choices, they are free to abandon their current commercial, political or religious attachments.

Scientific surveys consistently confirm that the less access people have to education, the less open they are to change and the less critical they are of those in authority over them.

In the Soviet Union today and throughout the newly emerging countries of Eastern Europe, those most favorably disposed to reform live in the cities, where access to education, information and cultural diversity is greater. Those least disposed to reform live in rural areas.

The city dwellers, with their window on a wider world, have been voting and demonstrating against their erstwhile Communist leaders.

The people in rural areas, on the other hand, have preferred to stick with what they know. They have continued to support the Communists (under whatever new name), even against their own best interests.

As Poland moves belatedly into the 20th century economically and politically, it is showing signs of movement in the religious sphere as well. This is inevitable, because



## ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

all three realms are closely linked. Polish Catholics told their bishops to back off from their efforts to abolish the constitutional separation of church and state. And the bishops backed off.

According to recent opinion polls, a majority of Polish Catholics also want their bishops to back off from their efforts to restrict choice on abortion.

If a remarkably high incidence of abortion exists in Poland today, it's not because most Polish Catholics have a moral blind spot about it. It's because of inadequate supply of housing, on the one hand, and of effective birth-control products on the other.

A majority of Polish Catholics may be worried that if the bishops win on abortion, they'll target reading material next, then contraceptives, then divorce, then homosexuals, and so on.

(On May 17 the Polish Parliament rejected the anti-abortion legislation supported by the bishops.)

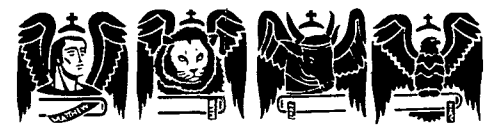
# Way of God is like seed's growth; needs time, patience

By Father Albert Shamon  
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 4:26-34; (R1) Ezekiel 17:22-24; (R2) 2 Corinthians 5:6-10.

You may have seen the following slogan on some bumper stickers: "Let go, let God." Next Sunday's readings remind us that God still has the whole world in his hands. Therefore, let go, stop trying to run the world and let God take over — he's still in charge.

In the beginning of chapter 17, Ezekiel uses the allegory of the eagle and the vine. Ezekiel reflects on his own turbulent times. The eagle, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, has torn away the crest of the



## A WORD FOR SUNDAY

cedar, Jehoiachin, King of Juda, and has planted a shoot, Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle and successor, after the deportation in 597 B.C.

Then the prophet soars into the future (R1) and foresees God taking a tender shoot, the Messiah, from the crest of the cedar, the House of David, and planting it on Mt. Zion where it will grow into a majestic tree, drawing all nations to come and rest beneath its shade. Thus, Ezekiel had hoped to give consolation to the Hebrew exiles in Babylon.

Our Lord faced a similar problem. His

disciples were beginning to get discouraged, wondering about him and his methods. John the Baptist had started out with a bang, but was put to death and his followers scattered. Now, Jesus was losing popularity. The opposition was growing and the crowds were decreasing. They had hoped for so much and so little had happened.

So Jesus told them two parables. The one about the seed growing had a twofold lesson. The first lesson was to be patient. As Eve Merriam wrote: "It takes a lot of slow to grow." A traveler made many visits to the United States. His first impression was that Americans desired power. They sought mastery over science and nature.

On his second visit, he changed his opinion and felt that the great desire of Americans was for money. The almighty dollar was their God. On his third visit, he felt that the great desire of Americans was for speed: instant results, stepped-up tempos in production. And he never changed that opinion.

That (quick results) was the temptation Jesus had to face. In fact, that was the temptation of the devil: turn stones into

bread and get speedy results. Jesus was saying in the parable that he was a sower. He was planting the seed, it just takes time to grow. Be patient and wait.

Secondly, the parable teaches that behind all things stands God. Someone once said Lincoln was a great theologian, not because he founded some school of theology, but because he saw the hand of God in the affairs of nations. We can plant (make plans), we can water (work on them), but only God can make them succeed. Man proposes, God disposes.

The parable of the mustard seed expresses the fulfillment of Ezekiel's parable (R1): from the smallest beginnings can come something very great. Perhaps this parable made the disciples see that they were the small beginnings. And far from being discouraged, they had better work hard, conscious that great things will follow.

Is this not a universal truth? The mighty Amazon begins with a mere icy trickle from an Andes glacier. All music comes from eight notes. All literature comes from 26 letters of the alphabet. It's not the big things that count.

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