

Poet fears church's power in Poland

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Czeslaw Milosz (pronounced "me-wash") is one of the greatest living Polish poets and novelists. For many years a professor of Slavic languages and literature at the University of California in Berkeley, Milosz was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1980.

His article, "A Theocratic State?," in the July 8 issue of *The New Republic*, deserves a wide reading among those who care about the future of Catholic Christianity, not only in Poland but throughout the world.

A determined and dedicated opponent of Communism throughout his life, the 80-year-old Polish poet has deplored "the profound erosion of man's religious imagination on the European continent."

But Poland seems an exception to the rule. Its churches are full and a native son sits on the Chair of Peter.

Moreover, the hierarchy and clergy achieved an "unusually high moral position" during the Second World War and its aftermath through their stalwart defense of basic human values.

In spite of all this, Milosz observes, "people in Poland have begun to fear the priests, and this is not a good sign."

"Since my own experience includes two interwar decades when the Concordat with the Church granted the parish priest and the school catechist such immense power that neither teachers nor students dared to tangle with them," Milosz writes, "I find such a fear understandable."

That fear has carried over into the national Diet where some members are afraid to make statements that might expose them to the accusation that their views are not the views of believing Catholics.

He asks rhetorically whether the church should take advantage of its newly strengthened status in a post-Communist Poland and attempt to translate its moral agenda into law.

"I must insist," Milosz replies, "that the damage that an affirmative answer to this question would bring significantly outweighs the benefits."

At which point he appeals to the American experience and to the writings of Thomas Jefferson.

The separation of church and state in this country, he notes, has not prevented religion from extending its influence in society. Compared with Western Europe, the United States is "significantly less de-Christianized than the latter."

"Every official institutionalization and

every application of force is harmful to religious faith," Milosz argues, "and if at all possible it should be avoided."

When religious indoctrination is imposed in the Polish public schools (and without any prior debate), he believes an anticlerical reaction is bound to set in.

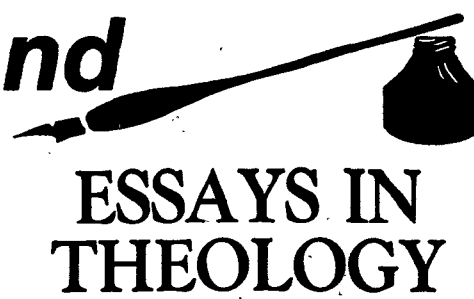
A similar problem is created by the clergy's "obsessive interest in questions of sexual morality." Neither can this be discussed freely in Poland, Milosz complains.

The fact is that "the world record for abortions belongs either to Catholic Poland or to the unreligious Soviet Union." Why so many abortions in Poland? Not because Poles believe abortion to be morally acceptable, but because of the absence of "an alternative means of contraception."

"The Catholic Church, by introducing a ban on the use of contraceptives despite the opinions of its commission of experts, shot itself in the foot, so to speak, and it has been unable to wriggle out of this contradiction ever since."

"If we take an unusually negative position against abortion, we cannot at the same time divide contraceptive devices into those that are natural and those that have been invented by science, banning the latter," Milosz continues.

"After all, the Church does not only



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

have the right to teach women that abortion is a great evil; it also has obligations toward women."

And yet every Polish citizen who supports the right of legislators to free debate on such questions is viewed as "a moral monster."

"It may be," he admits, "that the clergy will go on celebrating the national rite by sprinkling holy water, by blessing and exorcising, while at the same time making fools of themselves with their condemnation of sex, but in the meantime a hollowing-out of religion from the inside will take place, and in a couple of decades Poland will become a country as little Christian as England or France, with a strong dose of anti-clericalism ..."

In his view, the more powerful the clergy become and the more successful their program for what he calls a theocratic state, the more likely this terrible outcome for Catholicism.

Claudius becomes a follower of Christ

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

Just before he bolted and locked the door, Claudius looked intently at his two prisoners. They seemed quite harmless. In fact, the one called Paul had even said, "God's blessings on you" as Claudius fastened his feet into the stocks.

The Roman soldiers who had brought these prisoners here tonight had referred to them as dangerous criminals. A near riot had taken place earlier in the city because of an incident with a slave girl.

What did he know? The only thing that Claudius knew for sure was that he hated this place. The prison was the lowest rung of duty for a Roman soldier. It was supposed to be his proving ground for some other duty. He hoped it was soon because this post commanded little respect from even his fellow Roman officers.

What had the two said before they had left tonight? It had been a threat to him. "See to it that nothing happens to these two prisoners before morning or it will be on

your head!"

Nothing was going to happen to these two prisoners. Claudius had placed them in the innermost dungeon of the prison. Their arms were chained to the wall, and their feet were secured with the stocks. They barely had enough air to breathe in the place. They were far from the other prisoners. Their only companions were the rats. Nothing could happen.

It was a quiet night and Claudius didn't want to think any more about either these prisoners or this dreadful place. He went to his small quarters in the prison and fell to sleep immediately.

Around midnight, Claudius was awakened suddenly. What was that sound? He was accustomed to the prisoners crying out in the middle of the night. Some cursed their fates while others unleashed a score of insults on each other.

But this was something different. If Claudius wasn't mistaken, this was the sound of singing.

He hastened from his room. The prisoners in the main area were oddly silent, almost transfixed by what they

heard coming from the inner dungeon.

"Mighty strange men," one of them said as Claudius passed.

Claudius continued toward the dungeon. Why would they be singing? It was actually a rather pleasant melody, certainly not the strains of battered spirits.

He didn't like it. It was probably some sort of trick. Claudius would order them to stop immediately.

But before Claudius had gotten to the two men, a tremor rocked the entire prison so violently that he fell onto the floor.

An earthquake had occurred, one that was so powerful that every door had been flung open by the force! Before Claudius had recovered from his fall, he already knew what would happen next. Every prisoner would go free.

The shame of this incident would haunt his family name forever. He had only one option available to him. Claudius stood up and drew his sword to kill himself.

"Wait!" someone shouted. "There is no need to harm yourself. Everyone is still here."

The voice had come from one of the



prisoners in the dungeon. Claudius rushed for a light and discovered that what he had said was true. Not one of the prisoners had escaped.

Claudius entered the dungeon and fell on his knees before the two prisoners, saying, "What must I do to be saved?"

"Believe in Jesus Christ," Paul replied. "Trust your life to him."

That night, Claudius brought Paul and Silas into his own house. He dressed their wounds and served them a meal. Then Claudius and his entire family were baptized as followers of Jesus Christ.

Scripture Reference: Acts, Chapter 16:22-35.

Meditation: "Whatever happens, keep thanking God because of Jesus Christ. This is what God wants you to do." (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

HIDDEN MEADOWS
COMMUNITY

Florida Style Living For 55 years or older

Top of the line manufactured homes. Secluded & private. Many floor plans available. Professional landscaped, decks, large lots, lighting. Monthly fee includes: total lawn care, water, sewer, property taxes.

A Friendly Atmosphere Offering

- Club House for Community Activities
- Golf League
- Organized Trips
- Card Club
- Much More

SHOWN BY APPOINTMENT
CALL: 494-1424
7289 LAKE RD. BERGEN, NY 14416
1 Mile South of Rt. 33 & 19

FUNERAL DIRECTORS OF THE ROCHESTER DIOCESE

The funeral Directors listed herein offer pre-need and at-need services and counseling in accordance with the Catholic faith.

GATES	DiPonzio Funeral Home, Inc. (Across from St. Theodore's Church) 219 Spencerport Road Rochester, N.Y. 14606 429-6700	GREECE	Vay-Schleich and Meeson Funeral Home Inc. "Greece's Largest and Most Complete Facilities" 2692 Dewey Avenue 1075 Long Pond Rd. (716) 663-2100
Alvah Halloran & Son, Inc. Funeral Home H. Daniel Halloran 2125 Chili Avenue Rochester, N.Y. 14624 (716) 247-7590	Arndt Funeral Home 1118 Long Pond Rd. (south of Maiden Lane) Parking for over 100 cars Greece, N.Y. 14626 Ronald John Arndt (716) 225-6350	IRONDEQUOIT	ROCHESTER
McLaughlin Funeral Home Inc. John J. McLaughlin 871 Culver Road Rochester, NY 14609 (716) 482-1847	Schauman-Sulewski Funeral Home Inc. Edwin Sulewski 2100 St. Paul Street Rochester, N.Y. 14621 (716) 342-3400	Michael R. Yackiw Funeral Home 1270 Norton Street Rochester, N.Y. 14621 (716) 544-5000	Crawford Funeral Home, Inc. "Our Family Serving Your Family" Located at 495 N. Winton Rd. (Between Atlantic & Humboldt) (716) 482-0400
MONUMENTS			
HART MONUMENT CO. 2301 Dewey Avenue Opposite Holy Sepulchre Cemetery Since 1856 865-6746			