

POLAND'S NEW TOTALITARIANISM.

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The recent dramatic events in Poland linked to changes in all of the Eastern Europe due to the overthrow of an imposed political system elicit comparison with the situation in Poland in the XVIIth century when the development of the nation was interrupted by imposition of religious laws. From 1668 to 1776 apostasy from the catholicism was punished by death. The death penalty was then changed to banishment. Poland was the last country in Europe to abolish such a law in 1921. What we observe today is only a change in the dominant power, an imposition of a different totalitarianism with different slogans and approaches. Also, we are witnessing a revival of the traditional anti-Semitism among the members of the Catholic hierarchy in Poland¹ who behave as absolute and arrogant rulers of the country and society. Traditional and dangerous slogans: "To be a Pole is to be a Catholic," "God and the Fatherland" have reappeared.

Poland's contribution to the Enlightenment

However, Poland has made a unique contribution to the development of modern humanistic societies in the political, social, religious and moral arenas. This occurred during the Reformation in Poland, which inspired the most advanced legislature in Europe of its time to allow freedom of conscience. This legislature was composed of powerful and enlightened nobility who were anxious to defend their individual rights against a centralized authority. However, their legislation was a short-lived phenomenon, as the Catholic church organized a counter campaign that systematically eliminated religious freedom and culminated in the church's having one of its own, a cardinal and a Jesuit, ascend the throne in 1648.

It was a reaction to the counter-Reformation that gradually resulted in formation of the advanced moral ideas on religious freedom and church state relations. It was a group known under various names as the Polish Brethren, anti-Trinitarians, Arians, Unitarians, or abroad as Socinians that contributed most in this respect. Members of this group (to be referred to interchangeably as Polish Brethren or Socinians) were particularly singled out for persecution and later expelled because its anti-Trinitarian beliefs and ideas on religious freedom were abhorrent to the church. They were forced into oblivion for three centuries, forgotten in a country that continued to be dominated by the Catholic church.

The Polish Brethren lasted in Poland for about one hundred years, from the time when Peter of Goniądz delivered his credo at the Calvinist synod in Secemin on January 22, 1556, to the death of Samuel Przykowski in 1670. But they made an outstanding contribution to Polish literature and gradually developed the most advanced and pioneering ideas in the social, political, and religious fields. About 500 treatises are still waiting to be examined. The Polish Brethren were committed to a sincere application of original Christian teachings to personal, social and political relations. Their ideology was characterized from the beginning by: freedom of religious thought; applying reason to the interpretation of the scriptures, the revelation, and theological matters in general; absolute tolerance of all creeds and separation of church and state; the struggle for social equality among people.²

At their first synod in Węgrów in 1565, the Polish Brethren settled the matter of freedom of conscience: "Everyone has the right not to do things which he feels to be contrary to the word of God. Moreover, all may write according to their conscience, if they do not offend anybody by it." Protestant and Catholic reaction described freedom of conscience and tolerance propagated by the Polish Brethren as "that Socinian dogma, the most dangerous of the dogmas of the Socinian sect."³

The ideas of the Polish Brethren on religious freedom were later expanded, perfected, and popularized by John Locke (1632-1704) in England, Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) in France and Holland, and Spinoza (1632-1677) in Holland. It should be noted, however, that neither Locke nor the Socinians tolerated atheism: "Lastly, these are not at all to be tolerated who deny the being of God." They believed that "Promises, covenants, and oath, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist."

The ideas of the Socinians and John Locke were transplanted directly to America by James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, who implemented them for the first time in the American Constitution. They were philosopher-statesmen who shared a strong conviction in absolute freedom of conscience and distrusted any kind of established ecclesiastical institution. They believed that the established churches create only "ignorance and corruption" and introduce a "diabolic principle of persecution," and that the exercise of religion should be completely separated from government. To them, toleration was not enough; only absolute freedom could be acceptable. Democracy was an institution that erected a "wall of separation" between church and state, and protected the liberties of the minority against the imposition of the majority. Both were broadly educated and Jefferson had a keen interest in studying religions including that of the Socinians. Their writings follow Locke's ideas and echo the Socinian literature.⁴

The Polish Brethren were forerunners of the later thinkers who developed the ideas of the Enlightenment and humanistic modern times. The Socinian doctrines, if allowed to develop, would probably have brought true enlightenment to Poland. Their achievements were the highest in Europe of their time and originated all modern trends in political, social and moral

sciences, in biblical and religious studies, and in concepts of the absolute freedom of intellectual inquiry, liberty of conscience, and complete nonantagonistic separation of church and state. They put to practice the highest ethical ideals.

Growth of theocracy in Poland

Especially eager to control the modern post-communist society in Poland is the Primate Józef Glemp. He is a man of tremendous ambition, wanting to revive the role that the primates played in Poland for two centuries (between 1572 and 1795) as the *interrex* during the interregnum between the elections of the king and the second figure after the king. He opposed the agreements in Geneva in 1986 and 1987 between the Catholic church and the Jews on the relocation of the Carmelite nuns from the perimeter of the Auschwitz/Birkenau complex which was designated by the United Nations as an international monument to martyrdom.⁵ He also delivered an offending homily at the Jasna Góra Monastery in Częstochowa on August 26, 1989, accusing Jews of inducing the peasants to drink, of propagating communism, of collaborating with the Nazis, and of controlling the mass media in Poland to encourage anti-Polonism. He said: "Without anti-Polonism there will be no anti-Semitism here either." Finally he accused Jews who under the leadership of Rabbi Avraham Weiss of Riverdale, New York, peacefully protested the nuns' presence at Auschwitz, of attempting to kill the nuns:

"Recently, a squad of seven Jews from New York attacked the convent in Auschwitz. Admittedly the sisters were not killed nor was the convent destroyed because they were restrained - but do not designate them heroes. ... Let us differentiate between Oswiecim-Auschwitz where mainly Poles and people of other nations perished, from Brzezinka-Birkenau a few kilometers apart where most of the victims were Jews. Let us differentiate next between the secular and the theological levels. Let the new doctrine on the presence or absence of God at the place of sacrifice be explained and clear to all those believing in God, and let it not become a political tool in people's hands, particularly of non-believers."⁶

It is appalling that a leader and a supposed moral guide of the faithful delivers such an amoral and inciting hatred diatribe in a "homily" to thousands of believers who are obliged to heed him. Instead of communist apparatchiks today Poland is governed by Church apparatchiks. His scheme is clear and an old trick played over and over again in Poland by the church hierarchy: to blame the Jews or the intellectual and rational elites for all Polish problems, to stir up the anti-Semitic feelings among the simple-minded, and

then to exploit their nationalistic and patriotic emotions. Glemp was parroted by Mother Superior of the Carmelite convent Sister Teresa Magiera in an interview to the press: "The entire Polish government consisted of 75% Polish Communist Jews, appointed by Joseph Stalin with the specific intention of introducing atheism into Poland."⁷

Glemp's political mentors are his advisor Prof. Maciej Giertych and political thinker Roman Dmowski, founder of the anti-Semitic and proclerical National Democratic Party (1896-1919). Dmowski believed in the national state, considering ethnic minorities a threat to the Polish nation. Jews for him were an alien element, and accused them of corrupting European societies. He advocated getting rid of them by emigration and boycotting them economically. Glemp is obviously disturbed by the cult of personality surrounding the Pope in Poland and is not satisfied with his position as "being the second in command."⁸ It appears that the Polish church leaders have never heard of Vatican II and its spirit of reconciliation with the Jews, separated Protestants, and Eastern Orthodox church. The documents of Vatican II have never been translated into Polish, probably on purpose. Poland has a long tradition of anti-Semitic and theocratic primates.

Poland has always been a theocratic country governed by the church through direct participation in the government. Bishops were members of the Senate, clergy were in the Diet (Parliament), and the kings were controlled by their clerical advisors, preachers, confessors, and members of the cabinet. Poland had two brief periods of religious freedom: one during the short-lived Reformation between 1556 and 1638, and the second during the communist regime between 1945 and 1989. Contrary to church propaganda, during the latter period the church was free to perform its religious functions. The church was the only organization with private property and its own private university. The church was also able to organize conspicuous and massive religious festivities and services without any restriction, to publish whatever it wanted (nobody else could do it!), to teach religion, and spread its propaganda on church premises. It complained, however, since the state became a secular institution, and no longer including the church as an official part.

Abolishing the communist system in Poland in 1989 turned out to be only an illusory victory for the democratic and moral forces. Unfortunately, Poland entered into a new version of ecclesiastical totalitarianism that has long and bloody traditions in the European history. The true ruler in Poland is the Catholic church with the government as its secular arm. Before the elections in 1989 when Solidarity became legalized as a trade union and was getting ready for the elections to the Parliament, the church organized a group called the Civic Committee in a church in Żytnia street in Warsaw. On April 19, 1989 Wałęsa with bishop Tadeusz Gocłowski went to Rome to "give thanks to the Pope John Paul II (and the church) because they did not forget us, and because he continued to speak of the ideals that inspired us to hold on and wait for the end of communism, ... we seek his blessing for the journey that

lies ahead."⁸ Visits to and consultations with Primate Józef Glemp became routine events. In May 17, 1989 the Parliament passed the law recognizing the Catholic church and "restoring a number of privileges."

During the election on June 4, 1989 the Solidarity group gained 35% of the seats in the Diet. Later President Lech Wałęsa called this victory "35% democracy." On July 19, 1989 the Parliament elected general Wojciech Jaruzelski president for the term of six years. Wałęsa remained restless and aspired to a more prominent role than that of union leader. During consultation with the Pope at Castel Gandolfo in August 27, 1990, the Pope advised him to commit Poland to catholicism and obedience to the church. Evidently, the Pope had specific plans since one month later, on September 18, Primate Józef Glemp called all leading politicians and the entire Polish government (27 persons in total, including the then president, Wojciech Jaruzelski) to his palace on Miodowa Street. We read in *Gazeta International*, an English version of the *Gazeta Wyborcza*, an organ of the Solidarity group: "Polish Primate Joseph Glemp hosted Tuesday's "summit" (September 18, 1990) to determine whether future presidential elections would precede general elections or whether they should be held together, and when." A more detailed description of what happened there was given by President Lech Wałęsa in his book *The Struggle and Triumph*. The purpose of the meeting was to decide on future parliamentary elections and the future president (Jaruzelski was elected in July 1989 for a 6-year term). Evidently, the Pope decided that Jaruzelski should be replaced by Wałęsa. The pressure was applied on Jaruzelski to resign, as Wałęsa succinctly described it in his autobiography: "Jaruzelski got the message."⁹

During the subsequent electoral campaign the church applied all possible legal and illegal, moral and immoral methods to promote Lech Wałęsa. He himself described his attitude in words : "I knew I was the right man for the job of being the first elected president of Poland's Third Republic." One cannot dismiss his achievements and the role that he played in abolishing the communist system. However, his belief in superstition (amply documented in his autobiography *The Struggle and the Triumph*), his total submission to the church, his lack of understanding of democratic principles, and his fusion of piety with servility to the church make him an ideal puppet who can be easily manipulated. Wałęsa and similar individuals in the government seem to be the ideal front for the Catholic church in Poland.

The control of the political leaders is done today openly, and shameless. Most recently the archbishop of Gdańsk, Tadeusz Gocłowski, invited leaders of all of the political parties to his palace in order to discuss strategies for the September 1993 elections.

Recent reports from Poland indicate that the church influences the legislature directly by controlling the state and imposing church laws and regulations.

"In 1991 Parliament passed a bill which declares that the Christian ethical system is the basis of education in the public schools, and that the will of the parents is binding -- the child has no choice about attending religious classes Masses and prayers have become part of official ceremonies, as Poland shifts back towards being a Catholic country. There are crosses in official offices, police buildings, schools and the army. A bill has been passed ordering the state to return Church property taken by the communists (no other organization or individual has yet received such recompense) Politicians related to the Church often say officially that homosexuals are sinners. Divorce cases have been transferred to the higher court level to increase their cost and so decrease their number. There is no sex education program, and efforts are being made to limit the availability of contraceptives."¹⁰

The church obtained enormous benefits: special tax privileges, property rights, privileged access to television and radio, exemption from custom duties. In 1993 the church imported among other objects about 1,000 cars (Mercedeses and Alfa Romeos among them) and sixty-seven tons of chocolates, without paying any duties.¹¹

The report reads further:

The Church has become institutionalized as a part of the State. Among other encroachments on secular authority, the army has been clericalized, with priests now playing the role of the former political commissars; the Church hierarchy is regularly 'consulted' on the filling of state posts ... religious ceremonies have been made a programmatic part of national holidays and celebrations; religious symbols and icons have been introduced into the buildings of all public institutions, including the parliament.

More dangerous is the encroachment of the church on the consciousness of society:

The legislature's refusal to order a referendum -- despite a nationwide petition garnering 1.3 million signatures -- on making abortion illegal has taken away the sense of individual security. There is a common belief that the Church is a rising, new guiding force for society, with an obligatory 'one true world view.' Not surprisingly, the social response has been one of fear; the similarities with the past are too conspicuous to go unnoticed. Hypocrisy and self-censorship have returned like a plague. New

falsehoods, full of 'blank spaces' and simplifications that distort the Polish past, have replaced those of communist history. A new set of stereotypes have been introduced into Polish culture and tradition. Well-tested Orwellian principles of Newspeak are deforming language: distinctions are made between freedom and 'real freedom' or 'well-organized freedom.' Many concepts are being wrongly identified: universal moral values are Christian values; abortion is the equivalent of killing children; moral relativism is nihilism; anti-clericalism is anti-God; atheism is communism... The school is a principal target of the Church's efforts... Religious classes in Poland, mandated by law, [have as their aim] introduction of formal instruction in the catechism, which is to say religious indoctrination. A centuries-old tradition of religious instruction that excludes practice of skepticism or counter-argumentation is used in the classroom... The introduction of catechism to the classroom undermines the school's fundamental purpose... It dulls the ability to think critically and introduces cognitive dissonance... The classes ... damage the secular authority since the classes are in essence obligatory... Many children attend religion classes only because they fear the academic consequences of having a blank space in the 'religion/ethics' section of their school certificate. Instead of honesty and moral courage, the schools are teaching opportunism, hypocrisy and cynicism. The schools are also propagating both intolerance and the belief in the existence of 'only one truth' in the sphere of morality. To serve this truth, new 'family life' classes are being prepared to supplement existing religion classes, in order to teach the Church's views on family..."¹²

The emerging totalitarianism is far more vicious and dangerous than communist rule because it destroys the will, initiative, intellect, moral sensitivity, human dignity and makes out of a free and intelligent being an automaton reacting to the commands of the church.

Notes

1. Andrzej Bryk *Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust*, in *Partisan Review*, Vol. LVII, No. 2, pp. 228-238; Mieczysław Maneli *A Clerical and Present Danger*, in *The Humanist*, March/April 1990, pp. 19-33, 36. Władysław T. Bartoszewski *The Convent at Auschwitz*, (New York: George Braziller, 1991); first published in London, 1990.
2. On the Socinians, Polish Brethren, their development and their ideology see my articles: M. Hillar *Poland's Contribution to the Reformation: Socinians and*

- their Ideas on Religious Freedom*, in *The Polish Review*, Vol. XXXVIII. No. 4, pp. 447-468. M. Hillar *From the Polish Socinians to the American Constitution*, in *A Journal from the Radical Reformation. A Testimony to Biblical Unitarianism*. Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 22-57.
3. Jurieu, Protestant professor of theology at Rotterdam, cited by H. John McLachlan *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 9. Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704), bishop of Meaux, called the universal tolerance "cette théologie de l'impiété des sociniens." *Oeuvres Complètes de Bossuet*, ed. F. Lachat (Paris: Librairie de Louis Vivès, 1862-1863), Vol. XVI, p. 151.
 4. *Thomas Jefferson: Revolutionary Philosopher. A Selection of Writings*, edited by John S. Pancake with N. Sharon Summers (Woodbury: Barron's Educational Series, 1976). *The Complete Madison. His Basic Writings*, edited with introduction by Saul Padovan (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1953).
 5. Detailed description of the entire affair is given by Bartoszewski, *op. cit.* The affair was also a triggering point for evaluation in the Polish society of their attitudes toward Jews past and present. Though Poles have a blameless record during World War II, in the past their anti-Semitism was undeniable. Bartoszewski correctly concludes that the recent anti-Semitic atmosphere was a result of complete lack of knowledge of Judaism and its principles. Some members of the Polish hierarchy, still deeply anti-Semitic, exploited the situation trying to enhance the interests of the church and seize the opportunity to enhance the theocratic rule. The roots of the Polish anti-Semitism go to the religious indoctrination, thus to the church's social, political and theological doctrines.
 6. Homily is quoted in Bartoszewski, *op. cit.*, p. 109 & ff.
 7. Quoted in Alan Dershowitz *Chutzpah*, (New York: A Touchstone Book, Published by Simon & Schuster, 1991), p. 1837.
 8. The Auschwitz affair was resolved finally by intervention of the Pope, who originally wanted to leave it to the local church in Poland. Bartoszewski quite contrasts the attitude toward Jews of the Pope John Paul II with that of the Primate as two worlds apart; *op. cit.*, p. 147 & ff.
 9. Lech Wałęsa with collaboration of Arkadiusz Rybicki *"The Struggle and the Triumph. An Autobiography."* Translated by Franklin Philip in collaboration with Helen Mahut. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1992.
 10. "Report from Poland" in *International Humanist*, April 1992, p. 17.
 11. Gargantua i Pantagruel in *Bez Dogmatu*, No. 6, 1994, p. 28.
 12. Barbara Stanosz "Emerging Democracy or Religious State?" in *Uncaptive Mind*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1993, pp. 33-36.