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SPECIAL REPORT

CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS IN POLAND

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CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS IN POLAND

The simultaneous celebrations this year of a thousand years of Christianity in Poland and of Polish nationhood have brought about the most serious confrontation in a decade between the politically powerful Roman Catholic hierarchy and the Communist regime. The regime's vehement reaction to the church's millennium celebration plans and the holding of rival observances of the state millennium will provide occasions for friction throughout the year.

Aware of Catholicism's central role in shaping Poland's Western orientation, the Communists since coming to power have sought to weaken the church's hold over almost 90 percent of the population, destroy its traditional identification with the nation, and emphasize that under Communist leadership Poland has embarked on a new stage of its history. Both main protagonists in this struggle--Poland's primate, Stefan Cardinal Wyszynski, and the party boss, Wladyslaw Gomulka--must contend with strong emotional issues, divided loyalties, and external ideological influence. While neither can publicly accept indefinite coexistence, neither has so far pushed irreconcilable differences to explosive extremes.

Both sides are fully aware that the outcome of the church-state struggle will also have potential long-range effects on Polish relations with Germany and the West, on Polish relations with the Soviet Union, and on the world Communist movement.

The Dispute Flares

The current eruption of latent church-state rivalry was initiated by the regime last December over the issue of the Polish episcopate's conciliatory letter to the German Roman Catholic hierarchy, a message sent after detailed conferences between Polish and German bishops at the second session of the Vatican Council last fall. The 18 November letter accompanied a formal invitation--one of 56 such inviations extended by Wyszynski to Roman Catholic episcopates around the world--to attend the principal celebration on 3 May at Czestochowa of the millennium of Poland's acceptance of Christianity.

Evidently alarmed by the warm response of the German episcopate and the voluminous

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Stefan Cardinal Wyszynski

Archbishop of Gniezno and Warsaw, Primate of Poland

"The people could be without kings, leaders, and ministers, but never without their shepherd. . . Strike at the shepherd, and the sheep will disperse. Often this has been tried and proved true. But whenever it was done in Poland it served only to draw the sheep closer together."

Sermon at Czestochowa, 31 January 1966

"When we wrote to the German bishops and Catholics we wanted to tell them that if after 1,000 years, most of which had been difficult and painful for us, we desired to live as neighbors, we could achieve this only through the mutual understanding that is not prescribed in written laws but in the conscience and soul of nations."

Pastoral letter, 10 February 1966

Wladyslaw Gomulka

First Secretary, Polish United Workers Party

[illegible] who is [illegible] proclaims that he [illegible] coup d'etat, puts his [illegible] sovereignty before [illegible] nation."

[illegible], 17 April 1966

[illegible] determinedly against any [illegible] directed against the [illegible] We should all understand what the game is about and what the [illegible] are.

Speech at Warsaw, 14 January 1966

Cardinal Wyszynski officiating at rites of Feast of the Assumption, 15 August 1962.

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favorable commentary by the West German press, the Polish regime opened a vituperative campaign against Wyszynski's alleged "antistate" attempt to open a political dialogue with the German church and to call into question Poland's entire postwar orientation toward the USSR. The regime alleged that the letter reopened the issue of the Oder-Neisse frontier. The letter, it was charged, also failed to take cognizance of the existence of East Germany or to take an unequivocal stand against "revanchist" elements in West Germany. In addition, the regime complained that the letter represented Polish acquisition of the former German territories in the West as a necessary adjunct of territorial losses in the east, instead of as an act of "historical justice." Finally, the regime objected to the letter's request to "forgive and be forgiven."

Gomulka personally entered the fray for the first time on 14 January, making a speech in which he attempted to clarify lines of argument which by then had become obscured. He absolved the Polish episcopate of disloyalty on the issue of the Oder-Neisse frontier, but pinpointed the party's main charge --that the church was intent on using the millennium celebrations to stress its 1,000-year-old position as a "bulwark" against the encroachments of Eastern despots on a Christian Europe.

The resulting debate has developed into the sharpest church-state controversy since Gomulka's return to power in 1956. Both sides have increasingly given the impression that they are staking their prestige on the outcome.

Using all forms of news media and every occasion to lambaste the church, the regime has bolstered its arguments against the episcopate with stinging personal attacks against Cardinal Wyszynski. As part of a consistent effort to drive a wedge between him, the rest of the Polish hierarchy, and the Vatican, the regime propaganda apparatus has portrayed the cardinal as a fascist and as the main obstacle to improved church-state relations as well as to a possible Polish-Vatican accommodation. Although the mounting charges against Wyszynski have become reminiscent of those which led to his detention under house arrest between 1953 and 1956, there are no clear indications that similar drastic steps against him are presently contemplated.

Deprived of all means of publicizing his case except from the pulpit, the cardinal has vigorously rebuffed regime charges. He has, however, steadfastly refused to modify his basic position or to be provoked into taking more extreme steps. He has consistently called upon the people to show restraint and "patience in suffering."

Regime Measures Against Church Millennium Events

The regime's immediate objective in the present campaign

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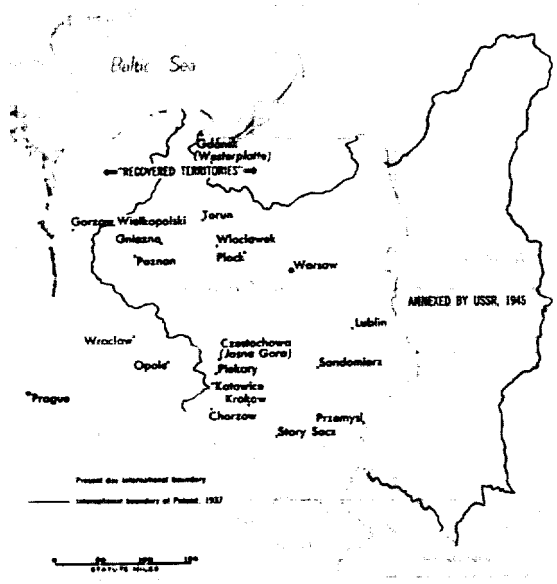
HIGHLIGHTS OF 1966 MILLENNIUM EVENTS IN POLAND



Date	Church Events (All masses or other religious services plus additional events as indicated)	State Events
16 April	Episcopal conference, Gniezno	Rally commemorating 21st anniversary of crossing of Oder by Polish units, Gniezno
17 April	Poznan	Patriotic rally commemorating state millennium, Poznan
1 May		May Day rallies
3 May	Consecration of Poland to Mother of God, Jasna Gora near Czestochowa—main millennium celebrations	Katowice rally commemorating 45th anniversary of Silesian Uprising Constitution of 1791 commemorated, Warsaw "Education, Book, and Press Days" inaugurated, Warsaw Poland-UK soccer match, Warsaw Poland-Hungary soccer match, Chorzow Relay races from various places in Poland to Katowice
8 May	Krakow	Reported sports events set, Krakow
15 May	Wloclawek	
22 May	Piekary	
29 May	Gdansk	
5 June	Lublin, in honor of Catholic University	
24 June	Warsaw	
26 June	Torun	
3 July	Sandomierz	
21 July		Solemn session of parliament commemorating 22nd anniversary of People's Poland, Warsaw
22 July		Poland's National Day; military parade and demonstration, Warsaw
24 July	Stary Sacz	
14 August	Opole	
15 August	Feast of the Assumption, Czestochowa	
21 August	Przemysl	
Early September		Unveiling of monument to heroes of 1939 Westerplatte battle, Gdansk
16 October	Wroclaw	
19 October		Celebration of Peace of Torun, commemorating destruction of Teutonic Order, 1466, Torun
6 November	Gorzow Wielkopolski	
13 November	Plock	
Date unknown		Laying foundation stone of monument commemorating "return of Recovered Territories," Wroclaw

NOTE: In addition, a regime-sponsored nationwide culture festival will be held throughout the fall, and secular celebrations of the anniversaries of numerous individual settlements will be held. These will in many cases coincide with religious rites.

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has clearly been to curtail the church's attempts to use the millennium celebrations to demonstrate to foreign observers, including leading prelates, the magnitude of its following in Poland. To this end, the party has limited international participation in the religious observances and prevented the church from further contact with episcopates abroad. On 9 January Cardinal Wyszynski was barred from foreign travel and thus from attending scheduled observances of the millennium at the Vatican in mid-January and from making planned visits to the Vatican in late May and to the US this fall. In early April the regime announced its decision to bar Pope Paul, all invited Catholic prelates, and most organized foreign pilgrimages from the 3 May religious celebrations in Poland.

The regime's refusal to permit the long-planned papal visit apparently resulted in part from its repeated failures to gain concessions from the Vatican, which has steadfastly refused to deal with Warsaw behind the cardinal's back. Reports on the most recent negotiations concerning the papal visit suggest that the regime's most sought-after goal was the appointment of an additional Polish cardinal specifically to the formerly German "Recovered Territories." This would have implied Vatican recognition of Poland's western frontiers, and somewhat diluted Wyszynski's dominance of the Polish hierarchy.

To drive home the point that even curtailed religious celebrations will not go unchallenged, the regime has spelled out detailed plans to hold rival secular observances of the millennium of the Polish state. Most of these events will be designed to portray the 20-year "achievements" of the Communist regime as the ultimate flowering of the thousand-year history of the Polish nation. The regime's plans also include, however, major cultural and sports events which will seek to siphon away popular participation from the religious celebrations.

The first simultaneous church-state events took place without incident at Gniezno and Poznan--both ancient Polish capitals--in mid-April. Although it appeared that the regime was consciously seeking a confrontation on the popular level--something it had up to then studiously avoided--Wyszynski's temperate response to sharp regime attacks against him and the ostentatious display of troops were probably instrumental in preventing popular disturbances.

While there was overwhelming evidence of popular support for the church at both rallies, Wyszynski's moderation may well be interpreted by the regime as a significant victory, and embolden it to clamp further restrictions on the 3 May rites to be held at the most revered of all Polish religious shrines,

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Jasna Gora, near Czestochowa. Domestic pilgrimages to Czestochowa already have been barred, and other travel restrictions, such as reducing the number of available trains, reportedly have been instituted. Stringent regime security measures reportedly are planned both at Czestochowa and in Krakow, where lesser religious celebrations are scheduled for 8 May. The regime is planning a mass rally in Katowice on 3 May which probably will attract some 300,000 Silesians.

Despite these regime measures, some one million Poles and many individual foreign tourists may attend the early May rites, creating serious problems of public control. The expected mass participation in an emotionally charged atmosphere could easily spark demonstrations. Although the regime probably would blame any disturbances on Wyszynski's "incitement" of the people, it is unlikely to risk widespread unrest merely to justify further possible steps against the cardinal.

Motivations and Protagonists

The regime's sudden onslaught after a short period of warmer church-state relations has led to reports that Soviet "advice" if not direct pressure influenced Warsaw in its decision. However, the course of the five-month struggle and the history of Polish church-state relations since 1956 strongly suggest that the decision was Gomulka's own. Although Moscow may have had its own clear reasons to be alarmed at the Polish church's letter to the German hierarchy, it could rely on Gomulka to counter any church moves which would jeopardize the basic identity of Soviet and Polish foreign policy toward Germany.

The vehemence of the regime's attacks against the church and the cardinal can be attributed in large part to Gomulka's awareness that he stands alone among Communist leaders in having to recognize a powerful internal ideological opponent. Wyszynski's repeated implication that the Communist regime is a passing if unpleasant phase to which the Polish nation must respond with traditional vitality and forbearance infuriates the party leader, who is equally intent on demonstrating to foreign and domestic critics alike that the virtues of Communism can ultimately persuade the Polish people to foresake the church.

During the initial period of political consolidation after 1956, Gomulka sought a mutually acceptable modus vivendi with the church--being fully aware the church's political influence, was far greater than that of his weak regime. Wyszynski's release from three years of confinement in October 1956 was followed by a church-state agreement in December which removed for a time most of the main points of friction. Official anti-Catholic propaganda was stopped, and religious instruction was permitted in the schools. Independence of church

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appointments was established, and clergymen imprisoned on political charges were released. Some seized church property was restored and, above all, Wyszynski was permitted to re-establish personal contact with the Vatican.

Although the stabilization of Gomulka's power soon heralded a virtual nullification of most of the guarantees contained in the 1956 accord, the regime accomplished this by a policy of gradual and flexible encroachment on church influence. It has thus been relatively successful in undercutting or meeting negative public reaction to the growing secularization of Polish life through restrictions on religious activities. These restrictions have included the elimination of religious instruction from state schools in 1961, seizures of church property, exorbitant taxation, barring of public religious processions, drafting of seminarians, harassment and slow liquidation of religious orders, elimination of the church press, and personal repression of individual priests.

Despite a significant alteration of the power relationship in favor of the regime by last fall, both sides made several hopeful moves toward some form of accommodation--probably in a desire to enhance their respective bargaining positions on the eve of the millennium celebrations. Thus, in September, the regime responded warmly to Wyszynski's public reiteration of his support for the official position on the Oder-Neisse frontier; politburo member Zenon Kliszko, Gomulka's chief aide, referred to Polish bishops as patriots; an unprecedented number of Polish prelates were permitted to attend the Vatican Council; and some moves reportedly were made to reopen a meaningful dialogue between the church and the state.

This improved atmosphere disappeared almost overnight with the bishops' letter to the German hierarchy, which the regime realized struck at the essence of its foreign policy. To Gomulka, the bishops' letter must have seemed a very real threat, both in substance and in the circumstances in which he first learned of it. There is little evidence, for example, to contradict the regime charge that the church failed to inform the authorities of its intentions. The regime apparently had to rely upon the text of the letter published in the West German press. As for the content itself, the regime clearly could not accept the episcopate's justification for Poland's acquisition of the "Recovered Territories" as compensation for its postwar territorial losses in the East. Equally offensive was the church's invitation to leading foreign prelates without prior consultations with the regime. Finally, the letter's appeal for mutual forgiveness, and the apparent partial equation of Polish sins in the postwar expulsion of Germans with Nazi wartime atrocities in Poland were not only unacceptable to the regime, but appeared to offer fruitful ground for propaganda exploitation.

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Above all, Gomulka could not allow the church to steal his central role as protector of Polish national interests vis-a-vis Germany. He could not leave unchallenged the church's clear implication that, nearly a generation after the war, a policy of reconciliation toward the Germans would serve Poland's interests better than the regime's consistent hostility. Nearly all Poles are united in supporting the inviolability of Poland's postwar western frontiers and fear renewed German power. For the regime to lose its carefully fostered position as primary spokesman for the Polish presence on the Oder-Neisse would have deprived it of one of its few solid claims to popular support.

An additional motive for Gomulka's response probably rests in the spirit of ecumenism raised in the episcopate's approach to the German church. In line with the Vatican's moves toward a resolution of ancient Christian divisions on a world scale, the Polish episcopate's initiative contrasted far too sharply with Gomulka's adherence to the Communist ideological position that the world is divided between mutually hostile forces.

Domestic and Foreign Reaction

Divested of specific issues, the church-state struggle in Poland has again emerged as one between two opposing political forces seeking popular support. The so far cautious power plays exercised by both sides suggest that neither is certain of its ground. While the church has clearly retained the support of the vast majority of the Polish people, there is evidence that some initial popular confusion resulted from the form if not the substance of the episcopate's approach to the German bishops.

The regime has been at least partially successful in exploiting the still strong memories of Nazi occupation among the people to portray the church's offer of forgiveness as "proof" of disloyalty to the modern Polish state and disregard of history. Such propaganda apparently has been particularly effective among Catholic intellectuals, many of whom have long viewed Wyszynski's strong adherence to the concept of the "church-militant" (i.e., anti-Communist) as inimical to the interests of Roman Catholicism in Poland.

Elsewhere in Europe, both East and West, the Polish church-state struggle apparently is being watch closely. The Austrian press in particular is a major commentator on the Polish developments, and may well be used by both the Polish episcopate and the regime for publicizing their points of view.

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The Czechoslovak and Hungarian regimes, mindful of the potential effects of the Polish struggle on their predominantly Catholic peoples, apparently have cooperated with Warsaw in demonstrating that--unlike the Polish hierarchy--their own prelates have made peace with the authorities. East German hostility toward the Polish episcopate's initiative apparently was heightened by the failure of the letter to acknowledge the existence of the "German Democratic Republic." There have been several unconfirmed reports of East German pressure on Gomulka to react sharply.

In West Germany, where the issue of "reconciliation with the East" gained new public attention earlier last fall as a result of a German Evangelical Church memorandum calling for such a policy, the Polish bishops' move was generally hailed as an indication that Warsaw's unremitting hostility toward Bonn is not fully shared by all Poles. This response, in fact, has been one of the primary cudgels used by the Polish regime to claim that the church move had encouraged West German "revanchist" elements to press their territorial ambitions in the East.

Outlook

Both the church and state will probably seek to use this year's millennium events to their own advantage, periodically punctuating the struggle with tactical moves designed to maintain some degree of control over future developments. Such moves have been evident in Gomulka's 14 January speech, in the 17 March party daily editorial welcoming the episcopate's "clarification" of the bishops' letter, and in Cardinal Wyszynski's consistently temperate responses to specific regime provocations.

Despite this apparent mutual awareness that little would be gained from a showdown in which neither side had hope of a decisive victory, the course of the rival millennium celebrations this year will hold constant danger of popular disturbances. It is doubtful that the episcopate will soon be able to satisfy the regime's undefined demand that it "demonstrate loyalty" to the state, or that Gomulka will moderate his personal animosity toward the cardinal. Regime attacks against Wyszynski will probably be maintained at a high pitch, and there is little likelihood that he will be permitted to visit the US this fall. Nevertheless, in line with its past attempts to isolate Wyszynski within the hierarchy, the regime may eventually make conciliatory moves toward the rest of the episcopate.

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Despite a firm commitment to the goal of eliminating the influence of the church on the Polish people, Gomulka has consistently shown skill and caution in pursuing his objective, i.e., the transformation of the Catholic Church in Poland into a politically and socially docile factor. His awareness that the struggle is likely to be prolonged and the outcome uncertain is evident from his statement in October 1961 that "religion is deeply rooted in our people.... It is difficult to say how long it will persist --certainly for tens of years, and possibly much longer." The cardinal, for one, not only shares this view, but has made it clear that in 1966 the Catholic Church in Poland looks forward to another millennium of shaping the consciousness of the Polish nation. (SECRET)

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