

Comment

We publish below a comment upon RCL which appeared in the Polish samizdat newspaper Wiadomosci No. 263 on 13 January 1987. This Solidarity weekly from the Mazowsze region has been published since 17 December 1981, its first issue appearing only four days after the introduction of martial law. The comment has been written in response to two articles published in RCL Vol. 15 No. 2 which deal with the relationship between the Polish opposition and the church.

Religion in Communist Lands is a quarterly published in England by Keston College. The title describes accurately the scope of work of this institution led by Michael Bourdeaux as well as the character of the journal, which comprises news, analysis, reports, and reviews of books published both officially and unofficially. All this is aimed at informing the English speaking world about the plight of churches and believers behind the "Iron Curtain". The editors are mainly interested in Christian churches, especially those under greatest threat, such as the Catholic Church in Lithuania or China. Often the fate of Christian communities is put across in articles about individuals who symbolise the struggle of believers with totalitarian authorities. Because of the strength of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, articles about Poland are slightly different. In an editorial to RCL Vol. 15 No. 2 1987 we read:

Keston College has been, for much of its history, unavoidably preoccupied with the affairs of churches which are institutionally weak (even though, as we have often seen, their individual adherents show great personal strength). It is good, therefore, that we can focus our attention on this occasion on a church for which the question is how best to use its social and political influence.

RCL Vol. 15 No. 2 was dominated by two major articles on Poland between 1981 and 1986. The first article, by Jonathan Luxmoore, is an attempt to describe the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards General Jaruzelski since the introduction of martial law.

In the second article Irena Korba analyses attitudes of different dissident groups operating in Poland towards the Catholic Church. On the one hand we have such *samizdat* periodicals as *Niepodleglosc*, *KOS* or *Tygodnik Mazowsze* which do not hesitate to express their disapproval of certain actions by the Primate or Polish Episcopate and to criticise the general political line adopted by the church. Dissidents writing for these periodicals see the church as too cautious and self-preserving. They just fall short of accusing the church of rejecting the idea of independence in order to pursue its own goals. On the other hand there are groups like *Glos* or *Polityka Polska* representing quite a different stand:

Since martial law, *Glos* has consistently defended the position and policies of the church, and particularly of Cardinal Glemp. It has argued that above all the role of the church is to influence those in power and to nurture a form of spiritual resistance within the community. It holds that Christianity is the main ideological opponent of the communist system, and that only Christianity can offer a system of social order which restores freedom and guarantees peace and justice.

We can only rejoice that there is a centre like Keston College which attempts to understand the character of the Polish Opposition, to grasp its strengths and weaknesses, its problems of ideology and organisation. The editors of *RCL* reject the simplistic division of dissidents into radicals and moderates so often used in the West. This division of dissidents is, of course, a reflection of the division of communist officials into moderates and hardliners.