

Andrzej Sarnacki SJ

**Institutional Changes for
the Polish Church
in Facing New Challenges
(1989–2005)**

**An Enquiry from
a Social Science and Social
Philosophy Perspective**

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Introduction

The role and the future of the Catholic Church has been a very lively and hotly disputed topic in Poland. Polish society, which has been in a period of rapid transformation since the year 1989, still struggles to create an identity that is new in many ways within the framework of vast political, economic and cultural changes. At the same time, it must deal with its own traditions and beliefs.

The Catholic Church has played a nationally important role over centuries of difficult history. It cannot stay immune to these all-embracing processes of social transformation. Its exceptional authority is a worldwide phenomenon. 95,4% of the population (of 38.650.000 Poles) declare themselves to be Catholic¹ and 75% affirm their trust in the Church.² At the same time, in this by and large Catholic society, one observes rapidly growing anti-clerical tendencies and continually declining acceptance for the Church's teaching on sexual morality as well as for its pro-ex-communist choices in the presidential and parliamentary elections. The Church suffers from the critique of being too conservative, too paternalistic and too slow in its adjustment to the rapidly changing state of affairs. Many predict that its influence and significance will gradually go down and that, similar to the fate of the Church in Western societies, Catholics are going to lose their dominant position in society. Poland's entry into the European Union most likely will only speed up the process of growing social laicisation.

¹ By comparison Catholics in other post-Communism countries: 86,3% of the population in Lithuania, 83,5% in Croatia, 81,8% in Slovenia, 66,4% in Slovakia, 64,6% in Hungary, 39,8% in the Czech Republic, 7,6% in East-Germany (Tomka/Zulehner 2000: 34).

² According to an opinion poll of TNS OBOP on 25-27 Oct. 2003 (Rzeczpospolita 11 December 2003).

These opinions are expressed as well within the Church, as it worries about its future and the future of Polish society. There are different expectations and ideas, both inside and outside church circles. How should the Church respond to the constantly changing needs of its members and of society? How are we to evaluate the Church's response up till now? This response may have a decisive role for the further existence of the Church. The stakes are high and the responsibility is immense. The response has in a sense already been given: not so much through some set of theoretical discourses as by the way of changing, or refusing to change, its own way of proceeding. Changes cause difficulties and resistance because they run the risk of causing mistakes that pay back, and because they challenge the already known and accepted beliefs and rules. But avoidance has also its price. Not to react is easier, but it causes in the long run the danger of the Church's becoming foreign and obsolete to the new generations.

We are entitled therefore to talk about an unsettled position of the Church and, through analysis, to indicate its possible future course. What the future will be like depends on the development of this complex situation and on the decisions made today by those who are responsible for the Church. This future development cannot yet be determined.

“Will subsequent processes of secularisation be the inevitable ‘side effect’ of the developed market industry, an open, pluralistic society and a democratic state?” (Dylus 1997: 63)³

The implications of decisions could be to some extent explained and in this way certain valid predictions regarding the possible future form of the Church could be made.

Our task therefore is to tackle this very pertinent topic of the meaning, present conduct and possible future perspectives of the Church in Poland. Our interest is to research both the institutional and organisational character of the Church. By ‘institution’ we understand here a social, durable enterprise that limits lawlessness or arbitrariness of human activities, defining the degree

³ Polish quotations are my own translation.

of formalisation of human behaviour and responsibilities. Institutions anchor these activities and behaviour in norms and values as well as through incentive structures. They serve both an individual by forming one's personal needs and the society by preserving its structures and stability.

“Institutions are simply patterns of behaviour which persist and crystallize in the course of time and to which people become attached as a result of their role in the formation of identity, or through investments of energy or social interests” (Wallis, SSE 400).

Although having defined characteristics, institutions remain flexible and undergo changes, especially during a transformation time. They also shift borders of responsibility, e.g. between the state, churches, trade unions or the military (Lipp 2000: 149).

“When we discuss the perspectives of faith in Poland, it would be important to focus on the Church as an institution” (Szawiel 2002: 34, in: *Więź* 3).

‘Organisations’ are social products created for a specific purpose, with their typical managerial-like features: division and allocation of labour, planning, decisions regarding strategy, designing of structure and systems, co-ordination of work, motivating workers, etc. (Kieser, SSE 566) Organisations are understood as resource pools (manpower, money, political support or religious identification), where the particular positions are ascribed according to one's competence, functioning under requirements of effectiveness and competition. The formal structure of an organisation's design serves the organisational purpose. Organisations are designed and the design mirrors particular understandings, perspectives and theories that create the context of the organisation's specific character. Designs should be justified because they tend to become stagnant and can carry on assumptions that prevent any needed improvement and growth.

An institutional character of the Church will be reflected in socio-economic and cultural analysis (chapters one, two and four), when the organisational character will be depicted in a more practical approach to managerial concepts, especially in the third but also in the fourth chapter. The specific perspective, institutional or organisational, will be made clear respectively.

We begin therefore with an analysis of the situation of the Church and Polish society that will help to sort out the key elements in the general picture. The first chapter outlines the situation of Polish society and of the Church according to political, economic and socio-cultural stands. In this descriptive part of our work, the meaning of transitional changes in these three domains will be delineated, along with their relation to and impact on the situation of the Church. Accuracy in this analysis is crucial for the appropriateness of further proposals. Some authors already draw attention to such a need.

“Pointing out the directions of the development of the future Church and foreseeing its particular tasks should be based on an attempt to diagnose the situation in which the Church has found itself, the exterior and interior threats, and challenges which it has to face” (Bagrowicz 1997: 6).

The economic, political, and socio-cultural situation of society and of the Church in Poland will be researched in available and relevant publications, mainly from the Polish but also from the German language zone. The choice of resources is not arbitrary but is based on the scientific quality of the research and its relevance to our analysis. The problem is complex, so should be the expected analysis, where

“sociology, economics, and political science are the three lenses needed to see organisations fully; no one discipline can capture their whole meaning” (Harrison White in: Davenport/Prusak 1998: 27).

In our presentation we will trace the alterations that took place in the Church and Polish society between 1989 and 2005. Due to their significance, these two dates create something of a natural framework. 1989 was a year of political, and at the same time economic and social revolutionary change in Poland (and in the whole Soviet block). 2005 was marked by the death of Pope John Paul II (2. April), who was undoubtedly the most significant person in recent Polish history, and by the new parliamentary and presidential elections, which have brought to power radical right-wing parties.

The second chapter is the normative part, and the next step in making an accurate assessment. An adequate diagnosis must be set in a wider perspective, since today the Church's and the social situation are both the result of numerous global factors. There is a need to reflect on the roots and scenarios of secularisation, on the requirements of democracy and on economic changes in an era of globalisation. Thus there is

“a need to foresee the development of the world, the human being and the concrete community in which the Church lives and operates” (Bagrowicz 1997: 6).

We will also bring to light selected key factors of the interior situation of the Church. Based on the facts, we will clearly point out the pattern of decisions being made by the episcopacy. Then we will reflect on the presuppositions that lead to particular decisions and their consequences.

In the background of our work there is a question about change. In the case of the Church, we are dealing with an institution and organisation with which there is no straightforward comparison due to its long tradition, its religious and national role, historical impact and functional integrity. Institutional changes are resultant of many parallel yet often conflictual, social processes (Eisenstadt, 1972: 409–419). Inevitably, in every society a more or less intensive process of exchange transpires between different persons, groups, organisations, and spheres. On one hand, there appear collective goals and acceptable norms carried by some ‘agents’; on the other hand, there are people who are willing to support these goals and norms by paying for them through financial or political support. These ‘agents’ are political entrepreneurs who evince a special capacity to articulate the new political goals, organize their network of communication, and mobilise the resources necessary for their functioning. They try to take control over basic institutional positions and resources, such as power, wealth, or symbols.

Because no society is homogeneous, that process of continuous institutionalisation of norms and settings of exchange takes place in every society and on several different levels.

“The possibility of innovation and change is not something external or accidental to any institutional system. It is given in the

very nature of the process of institutionalisation and the workings of institutional systems” (Eisenstadt, 1972: 418).

An institution continuously attempts to mobilise resources, preserve the boundaries of its system, and maintain the legitimacy of its values, norms and symbols. Doing that, it may affect the position of other groups in society and cause a shift of power and influence. In other words, it may give a rationale for a conflict. Clashing contradictions, conflicts, and shifts in the balance of power may lead to the depletion of resources needed to maintain any given system. Each system is sensitive to its environment; therefore, such turbulences may cause the crystallisation of new foci of resources and orientations, which may, in turn, create a new institutional system.

Changes do not happen automatically. Every society develops certain types of symbolic expression, in order to deal with important attributes of human existence and its goals. Symbols define the basic, fundamental norms of society and they become non-interchangeable. As the most important non-interchangeable commodities, one can name symbols and situations of basic cultural and personal identity, such as personal honour or belonging to a particular collectivity. They create a primordial core of personal relations and orientations.

Nevertheless, conflicts do not preclude that the institutional system will maintain its boundaries through its norms and values. Neither does conflict determine that the institution achieves accommodation, or at least partial insulation of some of its subsystems, so that, in the end, its order persists. The direction and scope of change depend on the nature of the system: on its values, norms, the quality of its organisations, and the various internal forces operating within it. Other major factors are also the external forces upon the institution, which become especially sensitive due to an institution’s systemic properties.

An organisational change, which by its nature can be planned and control to a relatively high degree, always requires a careful distinction between core, unchangeable elements, which constitute its corporate identity, and peripheral changeable elements, which need flexible adjustments in the course of time. In a process

of designing a change in an organisation, it could be especially challenging to identify and negotiate which elements do not have, as some might instinctively claim, universal and timeless value.

“A common mistake of would-be scientific history is to assume that today’s virtues must also be tomorrow’s and that a given factor, if positive once, must always pay. History doesn’t work that way. (...) Different strategies in different circumstances” (Landes 2002: 315).

Our understanding of an organisational change derives from a phenomenon described in the management literature as an empirically observable event that consists in a difference in form, quality or state that happens at a given time in an organisation (Van de Ven/Poole 1995). A strategic change is a transformation of an organisation, a process between two points in time, which concerns ways of using its resources. Changes in using its resources cause changes in the possibilities of achieving an organisation’s purposes (Gray/Ariss 1985: 708). Strategic changes redefine the relationship between an organisation and its environment (Larsson/Bengtsson 1993, Barnett/Carroll 1995, Hofer/Schendel 1978: 25).

The concept of organisational change will be presented in the third chapter, where some relevant managerial theories will be brought in. These instruments from management will serve as a help in systematising our data from the first two chapters, and sorting it out according to their level of importance. It will also suggest some possible solutions and strategies. The use of these instruments is seen as an innovative move that will allow us to be both critical and constructive in formulating our final conclusions.

This organisational approach will allow us to apply criteria that are common to all organisations and help us to understand their inner dynamic of development or stagnation. It is a way of objectivising processes that have been taking place in the Polish Church. Managerial criteria have a flexible, adaptable character that comes from an awareness of the complexity of organisational entities, based on vast research in multiple organisational realities and on comparative studies to other systems.

“Organisations are not easy to define in time and space. They are themselves open systems in constant interaction with their many environments, and they consist of many subgroups, occupational units, hierarchical layers, and geographically dispersed segments” (Schein 1986: 7).

Our purpose in using managerial theories is to clarify the systemic elements and dynamics in the Church. In this way we will look at the Church in Poland from an institutional and finally organisational perspective and not a theological one. The legitimacy of such a study will prove its validity in the course of a careful analysis of the Church’s situation within its environmental context, in the connection of the relevant factors with common organisational theories and at last by our reflection on Catholic Social Teaching that has its own criteria for the Church’s conduct. Some concrete proposals will emerge as possible developmental models for the Church.

This intent carries us to the fourth chapter in which we will draw some conclusions that become evident from the merging of the analyses in the first two chapters with the organisational theories in chapter three. We will make an appeal to important Church documents (e.g. from Vatican II and Catholic Social Teaching) in order to analyse whether or not our results, drawn from social and managerial theories, are able to be reconciled with the Church’s official criteria. We can already expect that many of these scientific ideas will not only not contradict the Church’s teaching but will even supplement it. Some of these theories will have to be limited and perhaps transformed according to the Church’s specificity. But in the end, we should be able to form and discuss some strategies for the Church.

This work has therefore a general character and offers a complex approach due to the intricacy of the topic. It is also the first work that covers such a broad area.⁴ The scope of such a work

⁴ There are already two major works that treat the Catholic Church in Poland in a more complex way: Jarosław Gowin’s *Kościół w czasach wolności: 1989-1999* [The Church in the Time of Freedom: 1989-1999] from 1999 and Dominik Hierlemann’s *Lobbying der katholischen Kirche:*

could be endlessly broadened. In modern times the problem is not so much the lack of information but its excess. The complexity of the issue therefore creates a problem of selection that has a polemic nature, since

“... the researcher must realize that gathering valid data from a complex human system is intrinsically difficult, involves a variety of choices and options ...” (Schein 2004: 203).

As pointed out in the title of this dissertation, there are two major perspectives that constitute our approach to the outlined problem: social science and social philosophy. The first will be presented more clearly throughout the thesis; while the latter, due to the limitations and parameters of our task, will stay in the background providing the context of understanding.

Our approach is ultimately pragmatic, i.e. it intends to put in a certain logical order numerous problems that challenge the Catholic Church in Poland, and to suggest some directions that seem to be crucial for the Church's future and for the Catholic heritage.

„Therefore serious talk and writing about the future must consciously refer to an evaluation of the present time and of the Church's mission” (Kostro 1997: 94-96).

Complex research does not make detailed predictions, but rather attempts to identify main problems and to propose some key strategies as possible solutions. Such a work must be done with care and consistency, being aware that the “diagnosis of causes in complex, multicausal situation is error prone” (Axelrod 1999: 140).

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das Einflussnetz des Klerus in Polen from 2005. But the first one does not take into account the global perspective, and the second one focuses only on the political issues. Neither of them provides sufficient institutional and organisational perspective.