Editorial

The years 1979, 1983 and 1987: the Polish Pope's visits to his native land — and British general election years. The coincidence is purely temporal, not causal. But the imminence of both events — just a few days away as this issue of *RCL* goes to press — might prompt reflection on the nature of political power and the place of the believer, the church leader, and the church as an institution, in the political life of state and nation.

Poland offers fertile territory for such enquiry. The state authorities there face a Catholic Church which is, by any measure, a powerful social and political force — more powerful than any other church in Eastern or Western Europe. With 95 per cent of all Poles baptised into the Catholic Church and eighty per cent of that number actually practising, it could hardly be otherwise. It might well be argued that the Polish Church's problem is not one of weakness, but of strength. Any institution which possesses the hearts and minds of the people to the extent that the Polish Church does must bear a heavy responsibility, especially if, at the same time, the best the government can expect from its citizens is grudging acquiescence.

The state is, of course, only too well aware that it has a powerful rival — not for governmental authority as such, but a rival nevertheless. Thus, in an attempt to undermine the Catholic Church's strength, it has adopted a remarkably benevolent attitude towards the smaller, non-Catholic denominations, with the result that they have gained privileges (such as the easy, legal importation of Christian literature) not enjoyed by their counterparts anywhere else in Eastern Europe. Admittedly, Poland remains a communist state whose long-term aims, and whose machinery for achieving them, are by no means untypical of the bloc (we cannot easily forget the brutal murder of Father Jerzy Popielusko by members of the security apparatus), but it would be untrue to speak of any systematic religious repression — still less religious persecution — in Poland today. What, then, should the Polish Church do with the freedom and — more important

— the influence it enjoys? When martial law was imposed, Cardinal Glemp felt obliged to counsel patience and restraint. Yet in doing so he risked appearing to endorse the government's unjust acts, thereby diminishing the church's moral authority in the eyes of the people — which was precisely what the government sought to achieve.

Two major articles in this issue of *RCL* provide insight into the church's dilemma. Jonathan Luxmoore's article (pp. 124-66) gives a comprehensive and detailed account of church-state relations during the period of martial law. His article is complemented by Irena Korba's discussion (pp. 167-81) of matters of church and state (principally in the period immediately following martial law), as seen through the eyes of the Polish underground. The church has had to take its share of criticism from that quarter, even though a strong Catholic Church is still identified, by many in the opposition movements, with the good of the country.

All this should make interesting reading for those seeking to explore the role of the church in society. The context discussed is of particular note in that the church was a genuine, active participant in events. In many other Eastern European countries it would not really *matter* very much what the church said or did, because, as an institution, it has been successfully marginalised.

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.

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