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In Search of Faith: the Metaphysical Dialogue Between Poland's Opposition Intellectuals in the 1970s

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Introduction

Since the communist system collapsed in 1989, the parting of ways between former friends and allies in opposition has been a prominent feature throughout Eastern Europe. Under the impact of political and economic change, previous beliefs and values have been questioned, and the assumptions and premises underlying past resistance subjected to sceptical, often cynical, reappraisal.

What is certain, however, is that the overthrow of the communist system in the 1980s presupposed a united opposition, and that this owed a great deal in turn to the common ground achieved by diverse opposition figures during the previous decade. In Poland, the Solidarity union could look to the consensus of objectives and principles forged by intellectual discussions since the early 1970s, which had born fruit in the emergence in 1976 of the 'Komitet Obrony Robotników' (KOR) (Committee to Defend the Workers), communist-ruled Eastern Europe's first organised opposition group.

Sure enough, this process of encounter and rapprochement affected only a small core of dissidents. But most boasted the potential at the time to exert an influence within their respective milieux, and have since enjoyed an importance far outweighing their actual numbers.

Today, for the first time since democracy returned to Poland, questions are being asked about what happened to the shared ethos embodied in Solidarity, to the normative values and common principles which were once so tenaciously defended. In this process, it is worth looking again at what the discussions of the 1970s entailed, and at the role played by the rediscovery of absolute values and religious beliefs in the articulation of political priorities.

By mid-decade the search for absolute values had become a dominant theme of opposition discussions as the collapse of Marxism's materialist premises, brought to a head by the traumatic anti-intellectual clampdown of 1968, continued to impel disillusioned enthusiasts to search for spiritual alternatives. This process had coincided with what sociologists identified as a wider 'desecularising current', as the psychological and cultural impact of industrialisation over the previous 20 years gradually slackened, producing signs of a more widespread religious revival. While 90 per cent of all Polish citizens were baptised Catholics, the proportion of students and young intellectuals describing themselves as Christians had fallen to 62 per cent. But three-

quarters of these were practising their faith regularly, and their number was growing steadily.¹

By 1975, Poland's loosely formed 'democratic opposition' had also begun to mobilise, helped by an apparent consensus on basic resistance strategy. For empirical reasons, most opposition figures were inclined to reject both the revisionist aspirations of 1956 and the open confrontation of 1968. What had found favour instead was a more modest programme of limited opposition, aimed at creating 'democratic spaces'.

When plans were announced later in the year for a series of constitutional amendments to enshrine Poland's 'brotherly bonds' with the Soviet Union and the permanence of the socialist state, the growing campaign of protests reached a peak. One petition, the *List 59 (Letter of 59)*, addressed to Poland's parliamentary and state authorities, even proposed an alternative programme of civil rights. All these documents were signed, significantly, by representatives of a wide cross-section of world views and political opinions, from current and former Communist Party members to non-Marxist 'traditionalist' writers and poets, and from former revisionist *komandosi* of the 1960s to Christian Democrats and anticommunist War veterans.²

The signatories also included prominent lay Church members, including associates of the Kraków-based 'Znak' publishing house, many of whom lost jobs and positions in the ensuing reprisals. When the amendments were submitted to the Sejm, the only deputy to abstain was Stanisław Stomma, the leader of Znak's small parliamentary caucus. Four other Znak deputies voted in favour, thereby sealing the group's long-threatened division. Stomma himself was dropped from the parliamentary list on party orders in Poland's March 1976 election. But by then several Catholic priests had given their names to the constitutional protest too, their confidence strengthened by an official *Wyjaśnienie (Explanation)* from the episcopate urging the Polish government not to react with renewed repression.

The constitutional amendments were a matter of vital interest for the Gierek regime if its efforts to build a national identity for Polish communists were to succeed. But although the Sejm accepted them after minor modifications in February 1976, the protests had produced an unprecedented show of unity and heralded a new stage in resistance.

Its chief characteristic was to be a growing readiness on the part of diverse groups and individuals to search for common ground, going well beyond the small, isolated intellectual clusters which had been meeting since the beginning of the decade. The differences between them remained. But they were treated as secondary, and were not allowed to obstruct the overriding quest for a unity of views on fundamental principles. This consolidation of intellectual resistance was the most important achievement of 1975. By the following spring, organised forms of opposition had begun to take root.

KOR and Its Origins

The first to declare its existence, in May 1976, was the Polskie Porozumienie Niepodległościowe (Polish Independence Alliance) (PPN), a small group of intellectual opponents of the regime coordinated from abroad by Zdzisław Najder. Its programme predicted an 'unavoidable sharpening' of the crisis confronting world communism, starting in Poland, and called on would-be oppositionists to prepare themselves by raising social consciousness and agreeing on common aims. While rejecting nationalism it stressed the importance of sovereignty and human rights, as

well as the role of the Catholic faith in national life and Poland's adherence to Europe's universal Christian traditions.

PPN's influence was restricted by its small-scale, conspiratorial nature. But it was an example of the kind of shared platform which might make wider agreement possible. In June the sudden announcement of price rises sparked mass worker protests in the central city of Radom and the Warsaw suburb of Ursus. Although the government postponed the rises, the protests were violently suppressed. And as arrests and interrogations continued, dissident intellectuals began to act.

The immediate response, the 'Committee to Defend the Workers' (KOR), was intended to be an open, public initiative, with the modest objective of offering humanitarian help to the families of detained Radom and Ursus protesters. There were, inevitably, different views as to who had thought up the idea in the first place. In a book the veteran socialist Jan Józef Lipski gave the credit jointly to Jacek Kuroń and Antoni Macierewicz, a non-Marxist former 1968 student leader. Kuroń himself insisted, however, that the first comprehensive initiative had come from Macierewicz.³

As a student Macierewicz had called himself a 'Guevarist'. He had denounced with equal vehemence the 'imperialist' United States and Soviet Union, and had collected signatures in 1972 against Richard Nixon's visit to Poland. By 1976 he was busily involved with 'Czarna Jedyńka', a Catholic Scout movement based at Warsaw's Rejtan secondary school. He had apparently lost none of his earlier radicalism, however. In an article written under the pseudonym 'Marian Korybut' and published in the underground journal *Aneks* Macierewicz had sketched out the programme for a 'broad opposition movement' which neatly encapsulated the key points of the emerging consensus on resistance strategy. Since 1968, he noted, both the revisionist and traditionalist wings of the Polish opposition had been in crisis. It was now essential to create unity – not just as a moral proposition, but in the sphere of actions too. The ultimate aim, however, should be to defend fundamental values, especially the value of freedom and its necessary preconditions of sovereignty and democracy.

At the same time, Macierewicz asserted, the opposition should resist the tendency advocated by Kuroń and Adam Michnik to forge close links with the Catholic Church, and should stop treating it as the only institution with the will to rebel against communist rule. A position of dependence on the Church would thwart rather than assist opposition objectives. 'The politics of the Church are long-lasting, whereas ours are for today', argued Macierewicz, who was later to serve as Interior Minister in Poland's conservative third postcommunist government.

We should leave legality to legal institutions, of which there are many – the Church, Catholic groups and associations, the universities. They have the ability and duty to lead the legal struggle in limited conditions. But how can we expect courage and non-compromise from them when we, the opposition, also accept their attitudes and limitations? Why should the opposition be identified with them, accepting their rules and restraints? We are attempting a common aim; and institutions which act legally should serve the opposition, not vice versa.⁴

Yet if Macierewicz's reflections helped to articulate KOR's overall strategy and outlook, the practical impulse for the committee came directly from the events at Radom and Ursus. This, as Lipski would acknowledge, was largely thanks to Kuroń, and especially to his capacity to encourage sympathetic people to act and organise. When the first information about the worker protests reached them, Kuroń and Lipski

went to Laski, the Franciscan centre northwest of Warsaw, to confer with Michnik. At the time Michnik was completing his book *Kościół, Lewica, Dialog* (*The Church, the Left, Dialogue*) in a room belonging to the late Jerzy Zawieyski, a prewar socialist and Catholic convert who had served as a Znak parliamentary deputy after the 1956 reforms. Together they drafted a letter 'in solidarity with striking workers'. It was to mark the symbolic culmination of the intellectual appeals and declarations which had marked the previous years.

Although KOR's inaugural declaration was finally issued only in September, Lipski himself dated the group's emergence from July 1976. During that month the first trials of protest leaders opened at the Ursus court, enabling KOR supporters to brave police intimidation and harassment, and begin building contacts with harassed workers. Two months later, the founding *Apel do Społeczeństwa i Władz PRL* (*Appeal to the Society and Authorities of the Polish People's Republic*) was finally circulated, with the signatures of 14 figures representing all shades of intellectual opinion.⁵ They included Kuroń and Lipski, Macierewicz and a fellow-Scout, Piotr Naimski, and four lawyers and historians associated with the prewar Polish Socialist Party: Ludwik Cohn, Antoni Pajdak, Adam Szczypiorski and Aniela Steinsbergowa. Another signatory was Jerzy Andrzejewski, author of the celebrated *Popiół i Diament* (*Ashes and Diamonds*), who had rejected his Catholic upbringing and thrown in his lot with the Polish communists in 1945, later becoming a model for Czesław Miłosz's classic work, *The Captive Mind*. Another, Stanisław Barańczak, a Poznań-based poet and literary critic, had belonged to the party in the 1960s, while another, the economist Edward Lipiński, was still a PZPR member. The three other *Appeal* signatories were Józef Rybicki, a veteran of the 1920 Polish-Soviet war; Wojciech Ziemiński, a printing expert; and Fr Jan Zieja, a priest from Laski who had served as a Home Army chaplain during the war.

KOR had no formally constituted membership. Anyone wishing to support its aims was free to do so; and within the next year, many others would add their names to the list of cooperators. At least five of the 14 *Appeal* signatories had been members of the Crooked Circle Club, Klub Krzywego Koła the only non-communist political club allowed to function after 1956 until it was disbanded six years later. Later adherents came from a wide variety of backgrounds. They included young ex-Marxist *komandosi* such as Seweryn Blumsztajn and Jan Lityński, artistic and literary figures like Hanna Mikołajska and Jan Józef Szczepański, and activists from the Catholic Intelligentsia Clubs and Church pastorates such as Henryk Wujec and Bogdan Borusewicz. Although there would be problems over who took KOR's decisions and spoke on its behalf, the group had up to 30 full-time collaborators by late 1977, and a list of active supporters which ran into hundreds.

What could so many different people possibly claim to have in common? The ex-Marxist Seweryn Blumsztajn saw at least three factors at work:

First, the formation was antitotalitarian. Our ethos was, at the same time, deeply democratic – not only in words, but in thoughts and actions too. No one wished to tell people what to do, only to encourage them to organise in defence of their interests. In the contemporary context, this amounted to a revolutionary message.

Second, we were antiideological. Many of us still considered ourselves people of the left, upholders of the leftist tradition of self-organised cooperatives and social movements, which had all in their various ways tried to answer to the world of work. Our faith and conscience told us that the

workers were a social force which could induce changes – people formed in this mentality naturally felt at home in KOR. Yet we had already experienced the adventure of a utopian faith that it was possible to create an ideal society, and had learnt that the final social result would always be unjust. So this time we were not interested in any ‘final’ aim or idea. Instead, we sensed that we were by-products of the failure of ideology – of the entire 50-year communist experiment. We had stopped thinking how to achieve an independent Poland through some sudden lucky turn of events. This time, we simply got on with building it step by step wherever possible.

Third, the Stalinist and communist experience had turned us into moralists. I myself belonged to a category of people which had been afraid to espouse absolute values – knowing, as Kołakowski had acknowledged, that there would always be a thin line between straightforward moral relativism and claiming (as Catholics did) the kind of values which could not be implemented. This time, we didn’t believe we could win, and were ready to look for a political compromise. But our life experiences had also taught us the dangers of moral compromise. In this sense, we were following the example of the Soviet dissidents. They were just a few isolated, frail individuals, waging a seemingly hopeless struggle for moral reasons against a mighty empire – as when a group of five gathered in Red Square to protest the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. Like them, we didn’t believe in victory. We just wanted to live in freedom ourselves, and hoped others would follow us.

For Jan Józef Lipski, KOR’s activity had to be seen in social rather than political categories. There were members and collaborators, of course, who had very clear political views. But there were others too who claimed no particular position beyond the desire for a sovereign, democratic Poland. What united them, Lipski agreed, was a basic antitotalitarian conviction, coupled with a readiness to defend moral and humanitarian principles. ‘We were always conscious that the differences between people – whether their worldviews were based on Christian or purely secular tenets – should not pose a barrier to cooperative actions’, Lipski later recalled. ‘This was made possible by the fact that we shared certain common ethical perceptions. But it also owed something to the ties of friendship and mutual respect which developed between us.’

Some Historical Archetypes

Initially at least, KOR’s dominant style of activity could be described as *społecznikowski*, an adjective denoting active social concern, expressed in this case by help for the needy families of repressed protesters. This inevitably required a certain harmonisation of attitudes. But individual activists remained at the same time ‘authentically autonomous’ and were free to follow up their own ideas and initiatives.

KOR’s aim was, in fact, to encourage just such a process, by initiating groups and milieux and encouraging them to be active and independent. Were there echoes here of the disobedient radicalism of the nineteenth-century Polish intelligentsia? If so, it soon became clear that the sense of purpose extended further.

Jan Lityński, a former 1968 student revisionist who joined KOR in October 1977,

thinks the central point of unity was found in activism. But it was an activism which also carried with it a sharp moral awareness. 'The characteristic feature was our sense of responsibility for the fate of the country, and our belief that we had a duty to act in accordance with the values we professed to serve,' Lityński explains.

In this sense, the means seemed no less important than the ends: we assumed that methods could not be used if they contradicted our stated objectives. The effectiveness of our actions was fated to be an issue which constantly divided us. But for me, the actions in question had to be taken in the light of values; and it was the values themselves which always had to come first. At the beginning, we had simply wanted to 'give testimony'. But step by step we also began to believe that our actions were bringing us closer to something new.

Not every KOR activist felt at home with this lyrical summary of aims. There were those, especially from Macierewicz's Scout movement, for whom the struggle demanded a form of heroic patriotism no less dynamic than that of the wartime Armia Krajowa (AK) and underground Polish state. But those raised on left-wing traditions looked with suspicion on grandiose patriotic declarations, especially those which stressed an exclusive link between nation and state. Both Kuroń and Lipski rejected state independence as a value in itself, and believed the opposition should give priority to ensuring democratic freedoms and human dignity. On this point there were, inevitably, seeds of future conflict.

The legacy of the nineteenth-century intelligentsia was nevertheless important. Like Blumsztajn, many KOR members consciously saw themselves as standing in a radical left-wing tradition which could find clear antecedents in earlier struggles for emancipation and freedom. But the link with the past also represented a point of vulnerability, which became a target of criticism for those who believed KOR was in danger of imposing a uniformity of worldviews. Adam Michnik's book *Koscioł, Lewica, Dialog*, published in 1977, introduced the concept of *lewica laicka*, or 'lay left', to describe the social and cultural features of Poland's non-communist left-wing tradition.⁶ But the term was widely misconstrued as denoting a contemporary political classification. Was it not just as wrong, critics asked, to place all 'lay leftists' in the same category as it would be to speak of a uniform 'Catholic right'?

In reality, intellectuals in both categories all shared the social and historical experiences of their generation. The discussions and dialogues of the early 1970s might have been limited in scale and scope, but they had reflected the urgent need to find a 'common language of ideas' between secular and Catholic opposition figures. What had emerged was now being transformed into shared political goals.

A key influence in this process of rapprochement was still being played by *Rodowody Niepokornych (Geneses of the Unhumbled)*, a book first issued by the *Więź* publishing house in 1971. Its Catholic author, Bohdan Cywiński, had intended the work as no more than a straightforward historical study of the Polish intelligentsia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but he had also unwittingly proved a revolutionary thesis: under the tsarist occupation the intelligentsia's Catholic and secular wings, far from being at odds with each other, had in reality been linked by a common 'ethical consciousness' which had impelled both to work for the good of others in a tolerant public spirit.⁷

Cywiński's proposition was widely credited with offering the emerging opposition a shared sense of historical mission. As a KOR collaborator he believed he was seeing the same intelligentsia ethos achieving form and substance in the 1970s. Its defin-

ing characteristic in the period covered by his book could be described by the term, *Żeromszczyzna*, after the celebrated writer Stefan Żeromski. Żeromski had shown how members of the intelligentsia, working beyond their own selfish interests, could help their fellow-countrymen to improve their material conditions, enlightening them with education and culture and giving them hope in the future. In effect he had advocated romantic ends pursued by positivist means.

Cywiński had identified a second key influence in the thought of the Polish socialist Edward Abramowski. Writing at the turn of the century, Abramowski had seen a link between attempts to overthrow the ruling tsarist system and efforts to change the nature of social ethics. Moral renewal, he had pointed out, should be seen as the decisive element in social progress; and the coming 'revolution' would be created more by changes in social mentality and ethical perception than by political upheavals or violent rebellions.⁸

In the interwar period Abramowski's ideas had inspired a renewal movement at Laski, which had established the Franciscan centre's reputation as a place where sceptical Polish intellectuals could come for advice and solace. Today, in Bohdan Cywiński's eyes, KOR could be seen as an attempt to relive this tradition rather than to create something new. There was an important difference, however. In the pre-1918 leftist intelligentsia groups Christians had been all but inactive. Today, by contrast, they had become increasingly visible.

Jan Lityński thinks *Rodowody Niepokornych* was one of the most important books for his generation. By comparison, Michnik's *Kościół, Lewica, Dialog*, although far better known outside the country, often seemed little more than a footnote. 'We were ourselves, in some sense, the fulfilment of Cywiński's book, just as Cywiński himself and people like him were somehow the fulfilment of our efforts too', Lityński argues.

The fact that we had stayed in Poland, and continued to struggle for ideas and values, was itself a consequence of the ethos to which Cywiński referred. We had stayed since 1968 for the sake of the way of thinking born from those encounters in the 1890s and after, which Cywiński had captured by showing the common values and priorities which both Catholic and secular intellectuals could share.

The Question of Guilt

In Lityński's case it was easy to see why the idea of shared values and principles seemed important. Born the son of a Jewish communist who had polonised his name on party orders after the Second World War, Lityński was typical of many younger opposition activists forced to come to terms with their own backgrounds. Other one-time *komandosi*, including Michnik and Blumsztajn, had also come from Jewish communist backgrounds, while several older colleagues, including Kuroń, Lipiński and Andrzejewski, had occupied party positions in the Stalinist period. All available personal details of this kind were eagerly seized on by regime propagandists to foster public suspicion of KOR's intentions and objectives.

Within KOR itself, such factors posed frequent problems. 'It was a far from unified group', acknowledges Bohdan Cywiński,

but it had a strong central nucleus, composed of the so-called *Kuroniowcy*, who were mostly young ex-communists or the sons and daughters of party activists. They were better educated politically than most other opposition

figures; and while they looked very critically at the authorities, they also looked partly from inside. They knew about the backgrounds and personal circumstances of most prominent party officials. In some cases, their own personal misfortunes invoked a deep resentment, which could be expressed by a rapid switch of political convictions from left to right.

The probability that KOR would be penetrated by the secret police meant that elements of its work, in such areas as printing and funding, had to be kept secret. But it was deemed better, at the same time, to accept the risk of police penetration than to live in an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust. Those wishing to be involved in KOR's work could be. What was required was a 'deposit of trust'; and that meant loyalty to one's colleagues, adherence to the precepts of truthfulness and non-violence, and avoidance of the tendency to exaggerate or glamorise one's own role in a way which could be exposed and discredited by the Polish regime.

In fulfilling these obligations, the ex-communists were no different from anyone else. When Anka Kowalska was introduced to KOR in January 1977 by Jacek Kuroń she was still working at the publishing house of the party-controlled Catholic Pax Association, which had accepted privileges from Poland's postwar regime in return for subverting the Polish Church and undermining potential opposition. Fearing a provocation, Lipski and others reacted with deep distrust, but they were reassured after reading a long testimonial letter in which Kowalska set out her reasons for renouncing her previous allegiances.⁹

Kowalska's eventual acceptance showed with particular poignancy that people were capable of changing, and that no one should be condemned for all time solely on the strength of past involvements. If reappraisal and forgiveness were possible, however, who had the right to assess the worthiness of those claiming a change of heart – especially when they included people who shared responsibility for the crimes of Stalinism? This was to remain, in Lipski's words, a 'very live question' within KOR's ranks. Opinions and attitudes differed widely when it came to interpreting historical events and evaluating the role of particular individuals. They differed on deeper moral and anthropological issues too – such as whether inner mentalities could change, and how far objective guilt could be attenuated by subjective circumstances. When the ex-communist Jacek Kuroń was beaten during a police interrogation, most praised his heroic suffering, but some were more inclined to see it as a necessary act of penance.

For his own part the veteran socialist Lipski was sure that evil acts had in the end to be forgiven. Judging the genuineness of pledges of contrition was also a question of trust, and this naturally varied in accordance with attitudes and experiences. 'Those who had been attracted to communism were expected to make a public admission of guilt', Lipski later recalled,

but this was a difficult area, since the harm inflicted by Stalinism had frequently resulted from a kind of madness, in which good intentions were not always excluded. Indeed, it had usually come from a mixture of good intentions and self-deception, knowledge and ignorance, intellectual sophistication and moral lunacy.¹⁰

KOR's own collective response was certainly grounded in Christian ethics, Lipski thought. It encouraged those most affected to see the problem of personal guilt and responsibility ultimately as something between the individual and God. It also ten-

dered the spirit of forgiveness implicit in the Gospel story of Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus and in Christ's invocation 'Let him who is without sin cast the first stone'. The call to reject violence and hatred was not always accepted without demur, Lipski conceded, and it was generally more welcome to the old than to the young, to members of the intelligentsia than to workers. When it came to putting the call into practice, however, there were no differences between religious believers and nonbelievers.¹¹

New Truths and Old Ideas

If attitudes to ex-communists had been affected by the Christian spirit brought to KOR by certain religious activists, this was by no means the only influence. Within a year of the creation of KOR underground *samizdat* journals had proliferated, articulating and propagating a variety of attitudes and viewpoints, and reflecting the growing demand for material exploring political tactics and priorities more overtly.¹²

All KOR activists had broadly concurred that effective opposition necessitated a readiness to pool efforts and resources, while remaining independent of official institutions, ensuring support from industrial workers and maintaining a 'non-vindictive attitude'. Although past hopes of working for change within the system had been decisively abandoned, it was assumed that the regime and its opponents both shared an appreciation of Poland's geopolitical situation and would be wise enough to avoid trespassing too blatantly on ground ruled sacrosanct by the post-1968 Brezhnev Doctrine.

By late 1976, however, efforts were being made to update and improve the opposition's general programme. In an influential article, *Nowy Ewolucjonizm* ('The New Evolutionism'), written in Paris during October, Adam Michnik summarised the arguments and observations which had circulated since the early 1970s. Until now, Michnik argued, the opposition's programme could be described as 'evolutionist', aimed at encouraging the communist establishment to introduce reforms. The 'new evolutionism', however, would allow society to organise itself more comprehensively outside the system, thus enabling all social groups to exert greater pressure for change.¹³

A second article, *Myśli o Programie Działania* ('Thoughts on a Programme of Activities') was completed and circulated by Jacek Kuroń in November. This concurred with the view that the best hope lay in a 'self-organising society' composed of small groups. 'This system, in which the party-state leadership has a monopoly of information, organisation and decision-making, can only be defeated by self-organised initiatives', Kuroń wrote. 'People should organise independently of the state, in this way breaking the state's monopoly'.¹⁴

At a time when political and historical ideas were in growing demand, opposition intellectuals were still finding time to read and discuss contemplative philosophical works as they had done earlier in the decade. The role of absolute values and religious beliefs remained the object of deep reflection.

In the early 1970s the exiled reform communist philosopher Leszek Kołakowski had urged those engaged in 'active resistance' to exploit the system's 'natural contradictions', while sticking to 'practical progressive measures', experienced in a long-term perspective. 'We are never in a position to define in advance the limits of flexibility of any given social organism', Kołakowski wrote, 'and experience in no way proves that the model of despotic socialism is absolutely rigid'.¹⁵ With the publication in 1976 of the first volume of his *Główne Nurty Marksizmu* (*Main Currents of*

Marxism) by the Polish Instytut Literacki in Paris, however, Kołakowski provided the first truly comprehensive critique of the communist system. Here was an internationally acknowledged philosopher who had faced and resolved the same deep dilemmas which had shaped the life experiences of so many Polish intellectuals. Paradoxically, Kołakowski, a former Stalinist ideologue, had gone much further than most of his non-communist contemporaries. After rejecting Marxism *tout court*, he had re-embraced Christianity. His essays on hope and faith, written in the 1970s, were having their greatest impact on the younger generation rather than on his own.¹⁶ 'My contemporaries were all, to some extent, Kołakowski's pupils – rebelling against him, disloyal and critical, but still created by him,' says Michnik, who returned to Poland in May 1977 after nine months in Paris. 'For our whole generation, he embodied intellectual rigour, civil courage and moral purity. Our thinking about the world, and about ideology and religion, was very largely determined by his attitudes and observations.' 'Kołakowski helped me to define and understand the situation in which I'd found myself – especially when it came to his revolutionary change of heart towards some form of openness to God', agrees Seweryn Blumsztajn. 'He could now be described as a religious believer, whereas I myself could not. But I sensed that in that respect too the border between us had become very thin.'

What made Kołakowski doubly important was that he was also a figure with the capacity to bridge the gap between contrasting intellectual traditions, showing how religious people in their turn could also benefit from certain elements of the ex-Marxist experience. His work was widely discussed in Catholic circles too. He was seen by many as a man with a multiple identity, in whom the philosophical and ideological streams of the twentieth century had somehow come together with dynamic and creative results. He had also, however, distanced himself decisively from his previous convictions and affiliations, and now stood on the border of a religious worldview, where his intellectual sharpness and discipline often surpassed those of the most acclaimed contemporary Christian thinkers.

Fr Józef Tischner, a Catholic philosopher from Roman Ingarden's Kraków school of phenomenology, concedes that Kołakowski's comprehensive assault on Marxism in *Główne Nurty Marksizmu* marked one of the most important stages in his own life. From a Catholic viewpoint, Tischner adds, there were missing points and perspectives in Kołakowski's work. The 'demasking' techniques used in his critique, for example, reflected his particular background and experiences, but came too close to instrumentalisation.¹⁷ In 1981 Tischner attempted to fill the gaps by publishing his own book, *Polski Kształt Dialogu (The Polish Form of Dialogue)*, on the encounter between Christian and Marxist philosophy; but he acknowledged the unique importance of Kołakowski, which lay in his ability to attack Marxism from within, just as in the 1950s he had attempted to discredit Thomist Christianity from without. Perhaps this radical critique should by rights have been provided by Christians; but their voices in this complex field could never have been as important as Kołakowski's, since he alone could speak as an experienced internal witness. Kołakowski's works had to be read, Tischner argued, not just as a critical discourse with Marxism, but also as a deeply personal discourse with himself. 'He was both a rationalist and a moralist at the same time – and as a moralist, he spoke on behalf of Christian values', Tischner argued in his book. 'Having in some senses initiated the dialogue between Marxism and Christianity, he concluded it by returning to Christianity – not to its latter-day dogmas, but to the inner quintessential ethos embodied in the sacrifice of Christ.'¹⁸

The Search for Common Ground

The dual impact of Kołakowski's work, both on ex-Marxists like Michnik and Blumsztajn and on Christian thinkers like Tischner, could be seen as a kind of metaphor for the mutual influences now being experienced through dialogue and cooperation under the banner of KOR. What were ex-Marxist and Catholic intellectuals learning from the encounter?

There were engaged Catholics, like the former *Znak* parliamentarians Stanisław Stomma and Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who could already claim considerable political experience. Catholic dissidents as a whole were acquiring a deeper understanding of politics, especially of the opposition tactics and forms of action best suited to the communist system. The ex-Marxists, by contrast, had entered a previously unknown realm of absolute values, and become aware, through their Catholic interlocutors, of what was meant by the transcendental dimension of the human person. In this way, both sides had learned that they shared a very similar social sensitivity. Under KOR's auspices, this was assuming concrete form in the language of human rights and dignity.

The humanistic values of brotherhood and compassion which KOR embodied were clearly the same as those of Christianity, even if not derived from the same experience of God; but whereas the Christian idea of compassion was addressed to all without distinction, in the humanistic form inherited from Żeromski and Abramowski it had acquired a more objective meaning in active support for working people and defence of the poor and downtrodden. For Christians, it was necessary to maintain a distance between compassion and action, and fill this with prudence and restraint. But for ex-Marxists and non-Christians, compassion always had to be linked with recourse to action. KOR had marked the moment when the need for political engagement was finally accepted by everyone, including leaders and members of the Church who had previously kept their distance from political opposition. A change in political structures had become the precondition for any other change.

In 'Chrześcijaństwo a Prawa Człowieka' ('Christianity and Human Rights'), an article published in 1978 after a conference at Warsaw's Catholic Intelligentsia Club (KIK), Tadeusz Mazowiecki stressed that the time had come for Christians everywhere to stand up for legitimate freedoms. It was largely thanks to the Second Vatican Council, he added, that the Church's own emphasis had changed 'from defence of the Church and religion to defence of human rights'. This should now be seen as the inalienable duty of all Christians.

We cannot forget, or adopt an uncritical attitude towards, the mutual relationship between the Church and the forces which generated the formula of human rights in modern times. Indeed, we can now see the need to rediscover a Christian perspective in our approach to human rights. During certain periods of history, human freedom was asserted against Christianity. The historical conflicts which marked the emergence of the modern conception of human and civil rights, and whose motives were political and doctrinal, made the Church treat the liberating tendencies as signs of rebellion against religion and God.¹⁹

Bohdan Cywiński is certain that this realisation had owed a great deal to the dialogue with ex-Marxist opposition activists, in which Catholic intellectuals like himself had been engaged throughout the decade. It had, Cywiński thinks, 'cleared away some overgrown paths', teaching Catholics how to appreciate and respect philosophies and

worldviews which differed from their own, and how to cooperate broadmindedly in the pursuit of concrete objectives. It had also highlighted the need for 'modesty and self-control' when it came to declaring that the Catholic approach was always right.

We had learned to think 'universally', seeing the world which extended outside Poland, and understanding the leftist principle that a poor person is holy and should be helped. We had also learned to be publicly engaged in issues of social justice – for Marxists this came naturally, but we ourselves had to learn it. And finally we had learned the importance of *szlachetność*, or noble integrity, a concept more characteristic of the older generation of secular leftists than of mine.

As for what the dialogue appeared to have offered to nonbelievers, Cywiński senses that this was best described as a 'deep and amply confirmed basis for hope'. Even if at times they lacked the capacity, Christians were always duty-bound to testify to the truth that mankind was saved, and that goodness would ultimately triumph against all forms of evil. This message found a deep resonance among KOR's ex-Marxist members. When it came to essential values and principles, differing interpretations and understandings remained, but these ceased to reflect a division between religious believers and nonbelievers. When ethical disputes arose, a Marxist like Karol Modzelewski could find himself on the side of the Catholic Bohdan Cywiński, just as the theologian Fr Jacek Salij could side with the ex-communist Jacek Kuroń.

Ironically, it was Kuroń himself who provided the clearest testimony of how far Christian values and beliefs had been accepted by KOR's ex-Marxist members. Having belonged to the original circle which had first met at the Warsaw KIK in 1971, the one time Stalinist had had the opportunity to discuss his own religious position with church leaders in the intervening years, including the Polish Primate, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, and Cardinal Karol Wojtyła of Kraków. It was under the influence of the ill-fated German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, however, that Kuroń had written his most important essay on the subject. In 'Chrześcijanizm bez Boga' ('Christians Without God'), published by *Znak* in 1975, he argued that it was possible to accept Christianity as a moral and ethical proposition even if one did not believe in the Resurrection or adhere to the institutional Church. Kuroń conceded that in his own search for God he had fallen short of embracing the Christian faith, but he accepted the rules of Christian ethics, rejected moral relativism and professed to believe in the transcendental character of absolute values. In this sense, even if the shock of his previous experiences prevented him from calling himself a Christian, Kuroń could be seen by opposition associates as a 'Christianised' representative of the secular milieu.²⁰

Although showing the effect of comparable dilemmas, Kuroń's position clearly differed in important respects from that of Jan Józef Lipski. A veteran of the prewar Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, Lipski would briefly lead the revived PPS after the collapse of communist rule in 1989. Brought up an atheist, he had never sought to join the Church but his intellectual and spiritual outlook had been created in the tension between the neo-positivism of Wittgenstein, on which he was raised and educated, and the tempting metaphysical view of life professed by so many contemporaries, Lipski could not call himself a Catholic; but nor could he be labelled a non-believer. In practical terms, he had maintained friendly contacts with Catholic priests at various stages of his life, and had long since come to appreciate the value of cooperation. The first approach had been made in 1968 by the Warsaw archdiocese's *Duszpasterstwo Miłosierdzia* (Pastorate of Mercy), which had

offered support after learning that Lipski was organising help for the families of imprisoned students. Then as now, his lack of a formal Christian affiliation hardly mattered to Pastorate officials; he was reaching people whom the Church itself wished to help, but to whom it lacked reliable access.

When it came to elaborating KOR's own ethos, Lipski was, ironically, widely seen as a propagator of Christian values. His moral authority was respected equally by both Catholics and nonbelievers, among whom his perceived honesty and integrity enabled him to play an important integrating role.²¹ Even before KOR, Lipski admitted, his own view of the world had been firmly grounded on the assumption that modern civilisation was created and shaped by Christianity. He therefore showed respect for previously agnostic friends and associates who chose to embrace the Catholic faith, as well as to those, like his own wife, who had remained devout practising Catholics all their lives.

Because of his faith, a Christian believes it will be tantamount to rejecting Christ if he fails to help a person who is imprisoned, beaten or persecuted. I see this as the specific contribution made by Catholics in KOR. Those who cooperated with them naturally came to understand and sympathise with their motives. But the awareness that the Judaeo-Christian order provided the foundation for our civilisation was shared by both believers and nonbelievers. It served as the basic context for our common civil thoughts.

Even without being a Christian by confession, I was aware that, as a Pole and European, I myself was largely created by Christianity. It formed an integral part of my personality, which I gradually became able to articulate. KOR certainly contributed to this clarification of my sense of identity.

So did Lipski's long-standing friendships with Polish priests – especially those, like the KOR signatory Fr Jan Zieja, whose sense of social engagement mirrored his own. In September 1972 he had heard Zieja preaching in Warsaw's Catholic cathedral on the anniversary of the 1939 Soviet invasion of eastern Poland. He had spoken 'very concretely', Lipski recalled, but also 'very emotionally', about the necessity of overcoming the popular resentment of Poland's mighty neighbour. It was an appeal for forgiveness and reconciliation which other opposition intellectuals, including Kuroń, remembered too. Some had compared it at the time to the Polish bishops' famous *Open Letter* to their German counterparts seven years before, in which they had pledged forgiveness and asked for forgiveness in turn.²²

Zieja's influence on KOR was far from accidental. He had a distinguished past as a social activist, having tried before the war, often in the teeth of official church hostility, to build cooperative links with radical social circles. As a social activist he represented the Catholic social tradition which had sought to marry Christian spirituality with an uncompromising sensitivity to contemporary injustices.

There were other priests who won the admiration of ex-Marxist intellectuals, such as Fr Ludwik Wiśniewski, an influential Dominican pastoral worker, and Fr Zbigniew Kamiński, a former chaplain of the wartime AK's decimated *Kedyw* battalion, who became an active KOR member in 1977. In *Nowy Ewolucjonizm* Michnik had given a foretaste of the appeal which was to be contained in his book the following year by welcoming the growing 'political value' of individual priests' support. As KOR's activities spread, this support had other consequences too – not least in determining the form in which many nonbelievers experienced Christianity and the Church for the first time.

The Pastorate of Mercy continued to channel support via Lipski and others. Although the sums provided were small, their symbolic importance was considerable. Meanwhile, collections were organised by priests such as Fr Leon Kantorski, whose Podkowa Leśna parish, near Ursus, included both agricultural and industrial workers, and Fr Czesław Sadłowski, who allowed local rural activists to organise a 'university' at his church in Zbrosza Duża.

In May 1977 Fr Bronisław Dembowski allowed a group of opposition activists to stage a week-long hunger-strike at his church, St Marcin's, in Warsaw's Old Town. Eight protesters launched the action at the church, which was run by Franciscan nuns from Laski, and 14 ended it, demanding the release of workers jailed after the Radom and Ursus protests. They included Bohdan Cywiński and Michnik's father, Ozjasz Szechter, as well as a Poznań Dominican, Fr Aleksander Hauke-Ligowski. What made protests like this significant was their uninhibited public nature; yet as small-scale but intensive opposition actions involving people from a variety of backgrounds they also provided an opportunity to experience shared risks and sufferings. Some opposition intellectuals believed this played an important psychotherapeutic role.²³

During the month of the hunger-strike, St Marcin's became one of many churches across Poland to offer memorial masses for Stanisław Pijas, a student KOR supporter from Kraków, whose death was widely attributed to the secret police. During a mass in Kraków, celebrated on a day of student protests, the Jagiellonian University's Dominican chaplain, Fr Jan Kłoczowski told 5000 mourners that Pijas would be remembered as one who struggled 'for justice, for right, for truth and for freedom'.²⁴

Despite his own long-standing contacts with priests like this, Jan Józef Lipski was destined never to see his sincerity accepted by Poland's Church authorities. In the June 1989 parliamentary election which steered communist rule to a peaceful end, the candidacy of a 'socialist and atheist' on behalf of the Solidarity movement was vigorously contested by the local bishop of Radom, in what Lipski later described as one of the most painful experiences of his life. After his death in 1991, at his own request, he was given a Catholic funeral and buried at Laski.²⁵

Some Personal Testimonies

There were other instances in which mutual influences experienced in opposition resulted in religious conversions. Jan Lityński, the product of a communist family, believes the generation which suffered alongside him in the 1968 clampdown shared a similar vision of the world, and that its members were to remain linked by ties of sympathy and trust whatever their political and ideological backgrounds. For Lityński too the mid-1970s were a time of 'religious searching'. When he had his daughter baptised in 1977, former Marxist friends living abroad ridiculed his decision, and accused him of betraying his convictions, but their reaction, Lityński was sure, merely signalled the exiles' estrangement from Polish conditions. Colleagues and associates at home expressed 'surprise' at his apparent turn to religion, but respected his action nonetheless.

Lityński's search was to end with his own baptism in 1981. One of the most important stages, he recalls, was his discovery of religion's 'universality'; but what pointed him to the Catholic Church was a series of long conversations during the decade, especially with the Warsaw Dominican Fr Jacek Salij. For all his opposition sympathies, Lityński admits, Salij was no liberal, and his 'rigourism' continually surprised friends and collaborators in KOR. While he found this hard to accept,

Lityński nevertheless respected the priest's openness and eventually concluded that, in reality, there was little separating them. Brought up on Russian writers like Dostoyevsky, with their constant struggle over relative and absolute values, Lityński had spent his life wrestling with definitions of truth and principle.²⁶ An essay written by Salij in the Poznań-based Dominican monthly *W Drodze* went a long way towards resolving his uncertainties. In his essay the theologian reiterated the importance of tolerance and broad-mindedness; but for Christians, he added, these had ultimately to be limited by the duty to uphold God's truth.

In common with others, Lityński had also been heavily influenced by the personal quest of the philosopher Kołakowski.

Like him, I saw the greatness and weakness of the Church, and the virtues and vices of Catholicism. Although I was beginning to see myself as a Catholic, I couldn't accept everything; but I realised that without the Church's institutional face, however terrible and execrable, there would have been no Poland. It also seemed very important that the faith was realised in community through others. For me, there was no other way to be religious. I fully accepted that the act of confession must happen through another person. Indeed, I knew that this very idea had also found an echo in non-religious figures such as Erich Fromm, who had observed that faith became complete not through ideas but through people.

Lityński never attempted to record his spiritual experiences in writing, and found the much-read religious discourses of Kuroń and Michnik superficial and contrived. Acceptance of God was, he was certain, an inescapable requirement for Christians. To attempt to extrapolate Christianity's moral essence, as Kuroń had done in his essay 'Chrześcijanizm bez Boga', meant separating oneself from what was most vital and important. There was, Lityński acknowledged, some profundity in Kuroń's approach. But his notion that the word 'God' could be replaced by 'the human person' was, in the end, a false one. 'His bottom line was the claim that one could cope without God', Lityński explains, 'but for a Christian, this was untrue. Kuroń had, I think, too much confidence in his own abilities. In his scheme of things, despite all the claims, faith and love ceased to have meaning.'

Michnik's book *Kosciół, Lewica, Dialog* was a significant 'work of discovery', Lityński concedes. But although Michnik himself was genuinely religious, he had also 'escaped' from Catholicism, and made a serious mistake in basing his thesis on the anachronistic concept of the 'lay left'. Lityński shared the view of others that the author had reintroduced the concept at the very moment when it should have been liquidated.

For Michnik, the main focus was on 'layness' rather than leftism. The key criterion defining the division between intellectuals was their degree of secularity and perception of the Church, rather than their attitude to leftist ideas. I think he should have argued, like the great Polish sociologist Stanisław Ossowski, that the humanist non-believer now had much more in common with the Catholic than with the communist. Although Michnik called for the tactical building of bridges between the 'lay left' and the Church, he also continued to associate the left by definition with a non-Christian outlook. He should have gone a step further and tackled a more comprehensive source of division: the traditional stereotype associating the left with a non-religious position. By failing to do so, he merely froze the division in perpetuity.

Some Church circles were inclined to dismiss Lityński's own experiences in turn. People like him, the sceptics argued, had encountered Christianity very largely through the medium of articulate but unrepresentative priests and Christian intellectuals. They had been encouraged to believe they could shape their own religiousness in a way which bore little relation to conventional Catholic loyalties, just as the nineteenth-century Polish intelligentsia had claimed religious inspiration while rebelling against the Church and all institutional authorities. Then as now, when it came to identifying with the Church, many had found themselves confronted with something quite unexpected – a hierarchical institution whose doctrinal authority had to be obeyed. Not surprisingly, the first impressions often bred consternation and disenchantment.

While both Catholic and ex-Marxist intellectuals could agree on the universality and supremacy of ethical values, as well as on the need to implement these values in practice, the differences were certain to prove important under conditions of sustained pressure. Whereas Catholics believed the values were handed down by God, their secular counterparts believed they derived from a non-religious natural law. They had their own God too; but it was an abstract non-personal God only, who generally stood above religious distinctions.

The ex-Marxist Seweryn Blumsztajn, who had carefully analysed what KOR's various intellectual wings professed to have in common, agreed with Lityński that the formative experience had been the repression of 1968. Like other one-time *komandosi*, Blumsztajn had been no more than a child at the time of Władysław Gomułka's October 1956 reform movement; and although his 'antitotalitarian activity' had begun at school, with protests against historical blank spots like the 1939 Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and the 1940 Katyń massacre, he admits that he and most contemporaries had been deeply indoctrinated with Marxist ideas. Some had enrolled in Kuroń's 'Red Scouts', or *Walterowcy*, while others, such as himself, had benefited from a degree of family protection as children of the party's Warsaw-based Jewish milieu.

As with countless other Polish intellectuals, Blumsztajn's Marxist phase ended decisively in March 1968. By the time he was coediting KOR's *Biuletyn Informacyjny* in 1976, opposition collaborators ranging from Kuroń to Fr Salij had come to know him as someone eagerly searching for religious inspiration, who had learned the texts of Christian hymns and prayers as well as of Jewish songs and invocations.

Blumsztajn never quite found the object of his quest. He subscribed to his own 'private Ten Commandments', but crossing the border to belief in God demanded a 'terribly big effort' and seemed to require that he deny himself in the process. He was, then, 'very reassured' to discover that others were facing similar dilemmas too, including Christians and religious believers 'on the other side of the formation.'

I had always read a lot, but it was thanks to people rather than to books that my own evolution occurred, resulting in my acceptance of the value of faith. Religious believers became equal partners at the moment when I realised that faith by itself didn't provide solutions to their problems, and that they for their part faced the same moral dilemmas as I did. God didn't simply show them what was good and bad. At times, they could find themselves confused and powerless too.

For those brought up as atheists, Blumsztajn concedes, religious belief proved supremely difficult. Besides requiring great effort, it presupposed a sense of meta-

physical need. Perhaps, in his own case, he simply lacked the necessary spiritual capabilities. In his book *Kultura i Fetysze (Culture and Fetishes)*, published by Warsaw's PWN state publishers in 1967, Kołakowski had set out the vision of a world 'full of holes' in which it had to be recognised that the vagaries of human life defied absolute explanation, and that the sense and aims of history could never be fully ascertained. Blumsztajn accepted Kołakowski's observation, but it brought him no closer to religious conversion. 'Catholics had found their own answer to this state of unknowingness', he explains. 'They had succeeded, in an act of faith, in forgetting about the holes. But although it didn't make my life any easier, I realised it was an answer I couldn't accept. I was far from being a nihilist; but I knew Kołakowski's holes existed.'

Yet when the doubts and uncertainties, agonising and pondering were taken into account, why did intellectuals like Blumsztajn not just join or rejoin the Church, undertaking a sacramental life in addition to assenting to Christian values and principles? The question was frequently asked in the Polish Church. And the answers which came back often encountered little sympathy.

One key problem, thinks Bohdan Cywiński, arose from the tendency among so many intellectuals to identify Christianity with absolute universal values. Those who had approached the Christian faith from this direction, Cywiński points out, often found themselves unable and unwilling to penetrate to the deeper level of religious and metaphysical belief. Cywiński remembers holding his deepest discussion on this issue with Jacek Kuroń, during which, despite his own ethical convictions, the former communist stuck to his position. 'I don't see the aspect you claim to see', Kuroń eventually told him, 'but I believe that you truly see it, and you should trust me when I say that I for my part truly can't'. Despite this, Kuroń admitted that his exclusion from the Church was largely accidental. There were doubting Catholics who had accepted the faith of their parents and never found sufficient reason to leave the Church. But although he himself would not have abandoned the Church if he had always been a member, Kuroń added, today he could not find sufficient reason for joining it.

The Kraków Dominican Fr Jan Kłoczowski, who was present at many discussions, recalls that the Catholic dogma causing most trouble was the Incarnation. Former communists like Kuroń might declare their acceptance of the Christian Gospel, Kłoczowski notes, but for most, faith in God never went beyond an ill-defined 'faith in values'. The majority of intellectuals were 'Agnostics' at heart, the Dominican thinks, who did not believe that the spirit could be expressed in material signs. This gave them an inbuilt 'metaphysical resistance' towards the Church and deeper Christian beliefs, which ultimately proved insuperable for those priding themselves on their free-thinking intellectual attachments.

For all that, an undeniable closeness had been forged between the opposition's Christian figures and the ex-Marxists and others who were seeking a new sense of life through ethical but nonreligious values. Few intellectuals could claim to be truly independent of Poland's all-pervading Christian culture. Did not the values which many claimed to uphold form part of a common heritage, however, which could be described as Gospel-based and 'Christian' even when not derived directly from the Church? Even allowing for the exceptional rigours of communist rule, there were those who believed the Church's claim to exclusivity in ethical and religious matters had become misplaced and counterproductive.

Kłoczowski's fellow-academic from Kraków, Fr Józef Tischner, who would later serve as a philosophical and theological adviser to the Solidarity movement, agrees

that the painstaking and imaginative efforts of opposition intellectuals to establish a common ethical and spiritual outlook deserved a more sympathetic church response.

By the late 1970s many from the 'lay left' had come to be characterised by a deep sense of moral conviction, even a kind of heroic morality. Although many never crossed the Church's threshold, such people nevertheless presented it with a great challenge. The Church had to recognise that it was a Church of sinners, in which spiritual treatment was needed by the sick, not by the doctors who administered it; but it had never really worked out what its attitude should be to the many people who nursed a sense of guilt for their participation in communism, and who had made great efforts to overcome the relativism and atheism of their indoctrinated youth. It should have been ready to embrace them, just as Christ re-embraced Peter, the man who had denied him three times; and with the 'great joy and happiness' which, as the New Testament relates, greets the return of lost sheep.

Criticisms and Evaluations

Inevitably, the Church's scepticism encouraged some observers to wonder whether the Catholic and secular intellectuals grouped around KOR could really claim to have achieved much common ground at all. Was it not, in the end, just a question of political strategy – or at best a shared psychological reaction to the failure of communist ideology?

There were some like Kuroń who, having made the grave error of surrendering their personality and conscience to the Communist Party in their youth, were determined never again to place their free will in someone else's hands. Not all ex-Marxist intellectuals had shown such guarded restraint, however. For some, the total discrediting of their ideology had created a total vacuum, which had needed to be filled, in turn, by something no less total. Did this not explain why some former Marxists appeared to have switched sides relatively easily to a new system of religious and moral thought which also demanded absolute allegiance, in which the language and concepts seemed to confer, in their own way, a kind of spiritual and cultural power, and in which teachings on the possibility of redemption appeared to confer legitimacy on otherwise compromised individuals?

Jadwiga Staniszkis, a Warsaw sociologist who was a student activist in 1968, remained a sceptic when it came to talk of any general rediscovery of religious faith. 'In the end, Michnik and others were far too optimistic about the role of church loyalties and religious impulses to advance the antitotalitarian cause', Staniszkis argues.

Intellectuals had resorted to *a priori* ethical judgments, using their own terminology, largely because of the difficulty of assessing current problems in any other way. This reflected, more than anything else, a lack of articulation, while the Church had, at the same time, made itself too open by attempting to accommodate too many practical demands.

'There had been a dialogue', agrees Aleksander Hall, a member of the breakaway Movement for Defence of Human and Civil Rights (ROPCIO) founded in March 1977,

but it bore few if any real fruits, and nothing came out of the many discus-

sion meetings by way of an important group synthesis. Of course, both Catholic and ex-Marxist intellectuals were influenced by the experience; but the sides remained very distinct, and although many close friendships were formed, they never constituted a common formation.

There had been a danger from the outset, Hall insists, that KOR would acquire an elitist, selective character. Its activists spoke in grand terms of having supplanted the collectivism of the party-state with a 'community of friendship' in opposition. There was still a world of difference, however, between secular activists like the medieval historian Bronisław Geremek, who had left the Communist Party in 1968, and the Catholic writer Tadeusz Mazowiecki, whose intellectual background, though subject to similar pressures, was very different. Neither could claim to be representative of any particular intellectual milieu; and the fact that they could act together did not mean that they held the same ideas and opinions.

For all the scepticism, there were nonetheless some important connecting threads between the many individuals who had rejected communism in search of something new. In place of the materialist thinking of their youth, many intellectuals had indeed sought a 'private Church' of their own. The result could only be glimpsed at a deep metaphysical level, and it was questionable whether it had proved sufficient to stimulate a genuine dialogue of partners; but the members and supporters of KOR had all endorsed certain ethical and spiritual propositions. They had rejected the totalitarian claims of the communist system and asserted the inalienability of human rights, showing sensitivity to social issues and respect for Poland's Christian traditions. Added to that, experience and intuition had produced a specific philosophy of life and action – a philosophy nurtured under extreme conditions, in confrontation with fundamental dilemmas, and commonly espoused by people at the meeting point between rival philosophies and schools of thought.

By creating space for independent ideas, KOR had injected new energy into intellectual life, giving powerful impetus to the search for common values and priorities among once-divided opposition figures. It could hardly claim to have stimulated dialogue and agreement on any wide, comprehensive front, but its very existence had certainly offered a model for coherent opposition thinking – even if some might still consider it a negative one – and had boasted the potential to mobilise independent thoughts and ideas, encouraging an openness to ethical values, and perhaps to religious beliefs.

KOR was lucky to have emerged at a time when the Gierek regime was at its weakest, limited by its mounting economic dependency on western institutions and still hoping, through innocuous concessions, to win back the loyalty of long-alienated intellectuals; but if it had succeeded in creating common ground by 1978, this was already being undermined by rival streams and tendencies which had begun to flow in different directions.

Besides ROPCIO, these included a Society for Academic Courses (*Towarzystwo Kursów Naukowych*) (TKN), or 'Flying University', which aimed to provide an independent study forum for students and intellectuals. In Kraków a Student Solidarity Committee (*Studencki Komitet Solidarności*) (SKS), set up after the death of Stanisław Pijas, had also spread quickly to other towns and cities. And in the factories, younger workers were showing tactical sophistication as the scope for social protests continued to widen progressively. The impact of groups like these, and how far they diverged from the original premises and postulates of KOR, would become clear by the decade's end.

Notes and References

- ¹ Sociological research shows the overall proportion of practising Catholics varying from 80 per cent to 90 per cent. The proportion of university students describing themselves as Catholics had fallen from 69 per cent in 1958, and was to rise again to 72 per cent by 1983. In a 1978 survey 22 per cent of university students said they practised their faith regularly, 27 per cent irregularly and 25 per cent on major feast-days, while 26 per cent described themselves as nonpractising. In 1983 a parallel study put the proportion of regular church attenders at 33 per cent and nonpractisers at 15 per cent. Figures from Zdzisław Walaszek, *'Religion and Politics: the Roman Catholic Church in Communist Poland'*, unpublished paper, University of Chicago, 1986.
- ² Petition signatories included: the current party members Jan Strzelecki and Władysław Bienkowski, one-time Culture Minister under the Gomułka regime; the former party members Bronisław Geremek and Stefan Amsterdamski; the 1968 student protest leaders Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik; the non-Marxist liberal essayists Marcin Król and Jakub Karpiński; the humanist poet Zbigniew Herbert and the writer Antoni Słonimski; and veterans of the postwar anticommunist struggle such as the lawyer Władysław Siła-Nowicki and the historian Władysław Bartoszewski. The *komandosi* (commandos) were the group of dissident Marxist students (Adam Michnik, Jan Lityński and others) who led the March 1968 revolt. The term was originally coined pejoratively by party propagandists, who called them Israeli commandos, with reference to the fact that many were of Jewish origin. (It was just after the 1967 Arab–Israeli war.) The dissidents in question later adopted the term and used it about themselves.
- ³ Jan Józef Lipski, *Komitet Obrony Robotników*, vol. 1 (CDN *samizdat* publishers, Warsaw, 1983), p. 41. English edition, *KOR: a History of the Workers Defense Committee in Poland* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1985). Jacek Kuroń, *Gwiezdny Czas* (Aneks, London, 1991), p. 7.
- ⁴ Macierewicz's article, published in *Aneks* before June 1976, was quoted in Jerzy Holzer, *Solidarność* (Krąg *samizdat* publishers, Warsaw, 1983), p. 46.
- ⁵ The *Appeal* was sent to the speaker of the Polish Sejm, with a covering letter from Jerzy Andrzejewski urging parliament to consider an amnesty for jailed workers.
- 'The victims of the current bout of repressions cannot hope to obtain aid and protection from the institutions formed to provide them. ...In this situation, the task must be taken over by the community at large, in whose interests the victimised workers came out, since our society has no means of defending itself against unlawfulness other than by solidarity and mutual help. It is for this reason that we, the undersigned, have formed a Committee to Defend the Workers with the purpose of initiating all forms of defence and help.'
- Quoted in Michael Bernhard, *The Origins of Democratisation in Poland* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1993), p. 83. See also Lipski, *op. cit.*, pp. 48–55.
- ⁶ Adam Michnik, *Kościół Lewica, Dialog* (Instytut Literacki, Paris, 1977), pp. 13–16.
- ⁷ Bohdan Cywiński, *Rodowody Niepokornych* (Biblioteka Wiezi, no., 29, Warsaw, 1971).
- ⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 8–11, 53–6.
- ⁹ Kuroń, *op. cit.*, pp. 18–21.
- ¹⁰ Lipski, *op. cit.*, pp. 65–66.
- ¹¹ *ibid.*, pp. 64–65.
- ¹² In January 1977 the first issue of *Zapis*, a literary quarterly, was issued by the 'Independent Publishing House' NOWA, offering poetry, essays and reviews denied an official outlet. Two other NOWA periodicals, *Puls* and *Krytyka*, followed within 18 months, while young Catholics from Lublin began publishing *Spotkania*, with the aim of 'confronting the different social, political and worldview streams which create independent opinion in our country'. KOR's 'official organ', *Komunikat*, began appearing in September, and was soon joined by a second *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, named after the main wartime AK journal and edited by Blumsztajn, Lityński and Joanna Szczesna. A year later another KOR journal took its title, *Robotnik*, from the Polish Socialist Party's turn-of-the-century underground news-

paper. It was followed in October 1977 by two alternatives: *Głos*, edited by Antoni Macierewicz, and *Bratniak*, published by members of the new Movement for the Defence of Human and Civil Rights (Ruch Obrony Praw Człowieka i Obywatela, ROPCiO). Officially published books also influenced intellectual attitudes, such as Hanna Kral's *Zdażyć przed Panem Bogiem* (*Standing before the Lord God*), a collection of conversations with the Warsaw Ghetto survivor Marek Edelman. And there were films, such as Piwowarski's *Przepraszam Czy Tu Bija?* (*I'm Sorry, Do They Beat You Here?*), which also captured the prevailing uncertainty.

- ¹³ Michnik's essay, written for the twentieth anniversary of the 1956 'Polish October', was first published by *Aneks* in 1978. See 'Nowy ewolucjonizm' in Adam Michnik, *Szanse Polskiej Demokracji* (Aneks, London, 1984), pp. 77–87.
- ¹⁴ Jacek Kuroń, 'Myśli o programie działania', in *Polityka I Odpowiedzialność* (Aneks, London, 1984), pp. 124–42.
- ¹⁵ Leszek Kołakowski, 'Hope and Hopelessness', *Survey: a Journal of East and West Studies*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1971, p. 42.
- ¹⁶ Leszek Kołakowski, *Główne Nurty Marksizmu* (Instytut Literacki, Paris, three volumes, 1976–9). English edition *Main Currents of Marxism* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1981).
- ¹⁷ Józef Tischner, *Polski Kształt Dialogu* (Krąg samizdat publishers, Warsaw, 1981), p. 91. Tischner made the point that Kolakowski's 'criticism from within' had paralleled his own longstanding critique of the Thomist tradition in Christianity, formulated by someone who was, at the same time, schooled and trained in it.
- ¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 96.
- ¹⁹ Tadeusz Mazowiecki, 'Chrześcijaństwo a prawa człowieka' in *Druga Twarz Europy* (Biblioteka Więzi, Warsaw, 1990), p. 79. The conference took place at the Warsaw KIK in October 1977.
- ²⁰ Jacek Kuroń, 'Chrześcijaństwo bez Boga', *Znak*, no. 250–51, April–May 1975 (published under the pseudonym Maciej Gajka). See also *Polityka i Odpowiedzialność*, pp. 17–33.
- ²¹ The Catholic Bohdan Cywiński, for example, has described Lipski as the best embodiment of *szlachetność* in KOR, a 'modest, unshakeable personality who always acted according to principle, and whose honest life was seen by nonbelievers too as a fulfilment of the Gospel injunction "Love thy neighbour as thyself".'
- ²² 'By the time of KOR my own milieu was deeply impressed by Zieja's past involvements', Jan Józef Lipski has testified. His sermon in 1972 had played a significant historical role by openly expressing the widespread feeling that at some stage we had to turn our thoughts to reconciliation with our Russian neighbours' (Lipski, *op. cit.*, p. 51).
- ²³ Private documents and letters collected by Fr Dembowski, now Bishop of Włocławek, at the time of the St Marcin's hunger strike contain numerous personal testimonies concerning the dramatic experience gained from living intensively with people of widely differing ages, geographical origins, social backgrounds, educational levels, professional lifestyles and even religions.
- ²⁴ Bernhard, *op. cit.*, p. 115.
- ²⁵ The decision to grant Lipski a Catholic funeral had to be taken by the highest level of the Church's hierarchy. In his funeral sermon the Dominican Fr Jacek Salij recalled Lipski's religious agnosticism, but added that his own admissions of uncertainty had related only to 'superficial aspects of the faith'. Lipski's life, Salij continued, had been 'authentically directed towards the God who is alive'. See Adam Boniecki, 'Pożegnanie' in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 25 September 1991.
- ²⁶ Lityński gave only a single tape-recorded account of his intellectual background, later published as 'My z Marca', in *Krajobraz po Szoku* (Przedświt, Warsaw, 1989), pp. 61–71.

Any quotation without a referenced footnote comes from personal conversation with the authors.