

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Diplomatic Relations between Poland and the Holy See and the Vatican's *Ostpolitik* from the Perspective of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Primate of Poland 1948–1981

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Abstract

The activity of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński as the Primate of Poland occurred in a period when Poland did not maintain diplomatic relations with the Holy See. The period between 1948 and 1981 can be divided, from the perspective of the Warsaw authorities, into three subperiods: no relations and no talks (informal and official), 1948–1965; negotiations, 1965–1974; and working contacts, 1974–1981. The years 1964–1978 were also the period of the apogee of the Vatican's *Ostpolitik* carried out by Msgr Agostino Casaroli, under the auspices of Pope Paul VI. Cardinal Wyszyński was directly involved four times in talks on the arrangement of Polish–Vatican relations: in 1951, 1957, 1963, and 1965. With time, however, the primate gained more and more distance from the purposefulness of establishing relations between the Holy See and communist states. It should be added that from the beginning of the 1970s, the primate was quite critical of the effects of the Vatican's so-called *Ostpolitik*. At the end of the pontificate of Paul VI, an open conflict arose between the Secretariat of State and the Primate of Poland, which was resolved only with the election of Karol Wojtyła as Pope.

Keywords: Polish Primate; Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński; Holy See; Communist Poland; PRL; Roman Catholic Church; Popes Pius XII; John XXIII; Paul VI; Polish–Vatican Diplomatic Relations; History of Diplomacy; State–Church Relations; Vatican *Ostpolitik*

I. Historical Context

Polish–Vatican relations after World War II are usually considered in the form of a triangle: the communist authorities in Warsaw—the secretariat of the state of the Holy See—the Polish episcopate.¹ From the perspective of the communist authorities, diplomatic

¹ Antoni Dudek and Ryszard Gryz, *Komuniści i Kościół w Polsce (1945–1989)* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2006), 295–310. See also Rafał Łatka, “Prymas Stefan Wyszyński wobec gry w „trójkącie”: Stolica Apostolska–władze PRL–Episkopat Polski 1971–1978,” In *Biskupi w rzeczywistości politycznej Polski „ludowej,”* vol. 2, ed. Rafał Łatka (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2022), 71–110.

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relations with the papacy were important, because the Vatican was the only international entity that had not recognized the communist government in Warsaw in the initial postwar years and had maintained diplomatic contacts with the Polish government-in-exile in London, which was a continuation of the prewar Polish authorities. This was a clear signal to the international community that the communist authorities did not have full legitimacy to rule in Poland.² The Polish communists, although they assumed an almost monopolistic position in all spheres of life, recognized the role played by the Roman Catholic Church in Polish society.³ As a result of population changes, the extermination of Polish Jews during World War II, gigantic migrations in the years 1945–1948 (resettlement of Poles from the Eastern Borderlands to Western Poland and the displacement of Germans from Polish territories to German occupation zones and the resettlement of Ukrainians), Polish society had become almost homogeneous, ethnically and religiously. Over 90 percent of the inhabitants described themselves as Catholics, and according to statistics, about 50 percent regularly attended the Sunday liturgy.⁴ It should be remembered that the social position of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland was also due to its activities in the nineteenth century during the partition period (when Poland, as a state, did not exist), when the Catholic Church contributed to the survival of Polishness and the strengthening of the Polish–Catholic relationship.⁵ It is also worth noting, as Piotr Kosicki recently emphasized, that long before the communists came to power in Poland, Polish Catholics undertook a reflection on social issues and Catholicism’s attitude toward leftist movements.⁶ Therefore, it was quite difficult for the communists in Poland to fight the church, especially in the initial postwar years. Thus, the authorities declared full freedom of religion, but a number of antichurch activities were undertaken at the same time. Despite this, the Roman Catholic Church retained a certain element of freedom and independence. This position was unique compared to other countries in the Soviet sphere of influence.⁷ The Polish communists, however, had to learn how the Roman Catholic Church functioned in Poland, to what extent it depended on its headquarters in Rome, and what powers concerning the Church in Poland were reserved to the pope.⁸ Thus far, these issues had been regulated by the concordat signed in 1925. The newly formulated communist government, euphemistically called the Government of National Unity, decided on September 12, 1945, to “declare the concordat non-binding,” *de facto* breaking off diplomatic relations with the Holy See. As an aside, it can be added that there was a dispute in the government between the ideologues (mainly from the Ministry of Justice) and the pragmatists (mainly from the

²Jan Żaryn, *Stolica Apostolska wobec Polski i Polaków w latach 1944–1958 w świetle materiałów ambasady RP przy Watykanie* (Warszawa: Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 1998), 17.

³Krystyna Kersten, *Narodziny systemu władzy, Polska 1943–1948* (Warsaw: Profil, 1987); Andrzej Paczkowski, *Pół wieku dziejów Polski* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1998), 127–205; Piotr Gontarczyk, *Polska Partia Robotnicza 1941–1944 Droga do władzy* (Warsaw: Fronda, 2003).

⁴Lucjan Adamczuk and Witold Zdaniewicz, eds., *Kościół Katolicki w Polsce 1918–1990. Rocznik Statystyczny* (Warszawa: Główny Urząd Statystyczny, Zakład Socjologii Religii, 1991), 19, 50–56, 167.

⁵Martyna Deszczyńska, “O genezie więzi katolicyzmu i świadomości narodowej w społeczeństwie polskim w pierwszej połowie XIX w.,” *Nasza Przyszłość* 35 (2021): 39–75.

⁶Piotr Kosicki, *Catholics on the Barricades: Poland, France and the “Revolution,” 1891–1956* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

⁷John M. Kramer, “The Vatican’s *Ostpolitik*,” *The Review of Politics* 42, no. 3 (July 1980): 284.

⁸Jan Żaryn, *Kościół a władza w Polsce (1945–1950)* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DIG, 1997).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs).⁹ The former wanted to break the concordat and secularize Polish society as soon as possible by introducing appropriate norms into legislation, while the latter saw the benefits of relations with the Holy See, including the possibility of neutralizing the Polish *émigré* authorities from London and the possibility of exerting a greater impact on the church hierarchy in Poland.

The necessity of contacts with the Holy See for bishops in Poland resulted from church norms, canon law, and customs that had been in force to that time. In connection with the assumption of power by the communists and the inclusion of Poland into the Soviet sphere of influence, Polish cardinals very quickly—first Primate August Hlond, then Archbishop of Kraków Adam Sapieha, and even later Primate Stefan Wyszyński—received special powers from the pope, which in some cases gave them the right to make decisions reserved only for the pope.¹⁰ Vatican diplomacy envisaged the possibility of completely cutting off the local churches behind the Iron Curtain from contacts with the Vatican. Nevertheless, it was necessary to maintain even limited channels of communication with the Holy See. The Polish bishops, who operated under increasing pressure from the communist authorities, especially in the first postwar decade, also feared criticism of their actions from the Holy See's secretariat of state.¹¹

From the perspective of the Holy See, the main purpose of contacts with the Polish authorities was to guarantee the continuity of the functioning of the Church in Poland, including providing it with maximum freedom in the implementation of its mission, and in a broader sense, through relations with Poland, to influence other countries of the Eastern Bloc in the context of religious policy.¹²

Additionally, for the government in Warsaw and the Polish episcopate, the key issue in contacts with the Vatican was obtaining acceptance of the Oder-Neisse border temporarily established in Potsdam in 1945. As a result of the shift of Polish territory to the west, the German structures of the Catholic Church (Archdiocese of Wrocław, Warmia diocese, Piła prelate, and part of the diocese of Berlin, that is, West Pomerania) and the Gdańsk diocese, which had previously been under papal jurisdiction, found themselves within Poland, (these former German territories were called the Western and Northern Territories or the Recovered Territories). It should be added that by the end of the first two years postwar, these areas had been almost completely abandoned by the German population and had been occupied by a Polish population.¹³ The question of the border was thus directly related to the problem of establishing Polish church administration in place of the German structures of the Catholic Church, which had been in place until 1945 in the territories incorporated into Poland. The Holy See—bound by the concordat with Germany—was of the opinion that it was impossible to change the borders of Polish dioceses and adapt them to the new course of the border

⁹Ibid., 65–79.

¹⁰Stanisław Wilk, *Nadzwyczajne uprawnienia Prymasa Polski Augusta kard. Hlonda w świetle dokumentów Stolicy Apostolskiej* (Lublin, Poland: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2020); Kazimierz Śmigiel and Piotr Lewandowski, eds., *Uprawnienia wyjątkowe prymasa Stefana Wyszyńskiego. Wybór dokumentów 1948–1979* (Pelplin, Poland: Wydawnictwo Bernardinum, 2020).

¹¹Jan Żaryn, "Nieznany list prymasa Polski Stefana Wyszyńskiego do Stolicy Apostolskiej w sprawie tzw. porozumienia z rządem z 14 kwietnia 1950 roku, Polska 1944/45–1989," *Studia i Materiały* 2 (1996): 291–308.

¹²Agostino Casaroli, *Pamiętniki. Męczeństwo cierpliwości. Stolica Święta i kraje komunistyczne* (1963–1989), trans. Tadeusz Żeleźnik (Warszawa: Pax, 2001).

¹³Robert Żurek, *Kościół rzymskokatolicki w Polsce wobec Ziem Zachodnich i Północnych 1945–1948* (Szczecin, Poland: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2015).

with Germany until it had finally been settled in international relations.¹⁴ Since it had been agreed at the Potsdam Conference that the final shape of the border would be defined in a peace treaty, the pope delayed until the matter was settled in the relevant pacts. The actual state of affairs—that is, the takeover of power in the Western and Northern Territories by the Polish state administration and the almost complete replacement of the population—forced the Holy See to consent to the establishment of a temporary Polish Church organization in this area. Its organizer was Primate August Hlond, who in 1945 appointed five apostolic administrators, who, with some exceptions, had powers reserved for bishops ordinary. The Holy See explained its position in this matter in *Annuario Pontificio* in a footnote published under the entry Wrocław (Breslau). It was pointed out there that the Holy See does not usually make definitive changes within the borders of a diocese, unless all legal and international issues concerning these territories have been settled on the basis of recognized treaties. As this was the case with the Archdiocese of Wrocław, the Diocese of Warmia, and the Prelature of Piła, the Holy See entrusted Cardinal Wyszyński with the task of ensuring appropriate pastoral care in this area and appointed four prelates to perform this task: Franciszek Jop in Opole, Tomasz Wilczyński in Warmia, Bolesław Kominek in Wrocław, and Teodor Bensch in Gorzów Wielkopolski.¹⁵ This is the key to understanding the community of views of the Polish Church hierarchy and communist authorities on the border on the Odra and Neisse rivers. Both sides of the internal conflict between the state and the church fully agreed that the border with Germany was unchanged and should be recognized by the international community. They only differed in defining the means necessary to achieve this goal.

The head of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński (1901–1981),¹⁶ the Primate of Poland (beatified in September 2021), was one of the strongest, not only religious but also political, personalities of his era.¹⁷ Undoubtedly, he had a great influence on the internal situation in postwar Poland, and his moral authority and steadfast attitude, especially during the Stalinist period, were appreciated in the international arena. He was, therefore, a person who successive leaders of the Communist Party had to contend with. During his primacy, these were Bolesław Bierut, Edward Ochab, Władysław Gomułka, Edward Gierek, and Stanisław Kania. And although it was during the leadership of Bolesław Bierut that Primate

¹⁴Wojciech Kucharski, ed., *Droga do stabilizacji polskiej administracji kościelnej na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych po II wojnie światowej. W 40. rocznicę wydania konstytucji apostolskiej Pawła VI Episcoporum Poloniae coetus* (Wrocław: “Remembrance and Future” Centre, 2013).

¹⁵*Annuario Pontificio* (1958): 167.

¹⁶Bibliography of works on Primate Stefan Wyszyński already counts more than 1,000 publications: Marian Piotr Romaniuk, *Prymas Tysiąclecia w słowie pisanym. Bibliografia życia, twórczości i posługi Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego 1921–2017* (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2018), vol. 2, 1019–1408. Recently, biographies of the primate have been published by Albert Warso, *Ojciec. Pasterz i Prymas, błogosławiony kard. Stefan Wyszyński 1901–1981* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sióstr Loretanek, 2022); and Rafał Łatka, *Prymas Stefan Wyszyński w realiach PRL* (Warszawa: Instytut De Republica, 2022).

¹⁷Researchers have not the slightest doubt that after the elimination of the independent parliamentary opposition (the Polish People’s Party), the Catholic Church in Poland became the most important independent representative of society. In this sense, the primate saw his role according to tradition as *inter rex*. See more recently Łatka, *Prymas Stefan Wyszyński*; Catholic political circles were not so important in society: those closer to the Communist Party like PAX, or those closer to the episcopate, but often critical of the primate, like Więź, “Znak,” and “Tygodnik Powszechny.” See Małgorzata Strzelecka, *Między minimalizmem a maksymalizmem. Dylematy ideowe Stanisława Stommy i Janusza Zabłockiego* (Toruń, Poland: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2015).

Wyszyński was arrested and interned in isolation for more than three years, he had the biggest disputes with Władysław Gomułka during the formulation and implementation of the Vatican's eastern policy by Msgr Agostino Casaroli. It should be added that Cardinal Wyszyński, although he was a Polish patriot, saw the church in its Catholic/universal/global dimension, and this is also how he looked at the activities of papal diplomacy behind the Iron Curtain.¹⁸

II. Thematic Scope—Aims and Sources

The primacy of Primate Stefan Wyszyński coincided with the period when Poland did not maintain normal diplomatic relations with the Holy See. The period between 1948 and 1981 can be divided, from the perspective of the communist authorities in Poland, into three subperiods: no relations and no talks (informal and official), 1948–1965¹⁹; negotiations, 1965–1974; and finally working contacts, 1974–1981.²⁰

The purpose of this article is to analyze the actions and views of Cardinal Wyszyński on Polish–Vatican diplomatic and political relations after World War II and the Vatican's eastern policy, as well as to try to define the factors that influenced Wyszyński's views on this matter.²¹ I treat this analysis as a case study of the bishop's attitude in a communist country to diplomatic activities undertaken by the foreign services of a communist country in relation to the Vatican and to the activities of papal diplomacy in a country from the Soviet sphere of influence.

The sources upon which this discussion is based are the primate's own notes in the diary *Pro memoria*, materials produced by Polish diplomats in Rome, and documentation from various agencies of the Polish United Workers' Party and the Office for Religious Affairs, as well as other additional church materials, including published documents of the secretariat of state.

At this point, I will only refer to the problems I have highlighted in another article, resulting from the lack of wider access to the archives of the secretariat of state from the

¹⁸ Andrzej Grajewski, "Kardynał Stefan Wyszyński i Agostino Casaroli. Dwie osobowości i dwie koncepcje wschodniej polityki Watykanu," *Studia Prymasowskie* 3 (2009): 51–79.

¹⁹ I am omitting here Tadeusz Breza's meetings with Fr Robert Leiber, as they were not of a negotiating nature.

²⁰ Wojciech Kucharski, *Komuniści i Watykan: Polityka komunistycznej Polski wobec Stolicy Apostolskiej 1945–1974* (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2019).

²¹ The term "Vatican's Eastern policy" itself is controversial. Some researchers apply it more broadly to the entire relation of the Holy See with the communist world, therefore, in the initial period (1917–1945) with the Soviet Union, and since 1945, with countries from the Soviet sphere of influence. See Hansjakob Stehle, *Die Ostpolitik des Vatikans 1917–1975* (München–Zürich, Germany: R. Piper Verlag, 1975); for this work, I used the Polish edition: Hansjakob Stehle, *Tajna dyplomacja Watykanu. Papiestwo wobec komunizmu (1917–1991)*, trans. Ryszard Drecki and Michał Struczyński (Warszawa: Real, 1993). On a more narrow scale, researchers use this notion (sometimes adding the adjective "new" to the term Ostpolitik) to talk about the activity of Vatican diplomacy carried out primarily through Mons. Agostino Casaroli. See Agostino Casaroli, *Il martirio della pazienza. La Santa Sede e i paesi comunisti 1963–89* (Torino, Italy: Einaudi, cop., 2000<); Heinz Hürten, "Was heißt Vatikanische Ostpolitik? Eine einführende Skizze," in *Vatikanische Ostpolitik unter Johannes XXIII und Paul VI 1958–1978*, ed. Karl-Joseph Hummel (Paderbor, Germany: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1999), 1–17; cf. Giovanni Barberini, *L'ostpolitik della Santa Sede: Un dialogo lungo e faticoso* (Bologna, Italy: Il Mulino, 2007); András Fejérdy, ed., *The Vatican 'Ostpolitik' 1958–1978. Responsibility and Witness during John XXIII and Paul VI* (Rome: Viella - Istituto Balassi. Accademia d'Ungheria in Roma, 2016).

periods of the pontificates of John XXIII and Paul VI.²² This shortcoming has a significant impact on our perception of the activities of Vatican diplomats in this period and can only be compensated to a small extent by the use of domestic materials, in our case Polish, from the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the archives of the secretariat of the Primate of Poland.

III. The Views of Fr. Stefan Wyszyński on the Role of the Holy See in the International Arena in the First Years after World War II

An interesting point of reference from the beginning of Stefan Wyszyński's career in the Polish episcopate that influenced his views on the role of the Holy See in the international space is the publication, today somewhat overlooked, of Rev. Stefan Zuzelski's (the pseudonym of Cardinal Wyszyński, then a priest) *the Holy See and the Post-War World*.²³ Tangentially, I would like to add that the text was published in the summer of 1945, when it was not yet certain that the postwar communist government in Poland would sever diplomatic relations with the Holy See. From the exegesis of the speeches of Pius XII emerges a picture of the views of the later head of the Church in Poland on the most important issues for the world then emerging from the war. Father Wyszyński described the role of the Holy See in organizing it. Accordingly, he indicated that the constitutional foundations of states should be based on moral principles that the pope would guard.²⁴ He also pointed out that only states which recognize natural law as a foundation for international law could fulfil all obligations.²⁵ In the context of the decision of the communist authorities of September 12, 1945, to declare the concordat nonbinding, the cited principle of *pacta sunt servanda* sounded quite prophetic as a condition for the coexistence of peoples. Father Wyszyński quite clearly described the tasks facing the Holy See in the field of international politics. The concept of freedom was crucial here; the later primate indicated three main tasks: (1) "The Holy See fights for the full sovereignty of all nations"; (2) "The Holy See fights for the economic sovereignty of small nations"; (3) "The Holy See fights for the cultural value of nations."²⁶

Wyszyński saw in the papacy a guarantor of an international order, understood not only politically, but also built on morality and Christian values; therefore, he wrote: "One should achieve victory over the treacherous principle that utility is a rule of law, that force creates law."²⁷ The later cardinal defined the state as a community of free people, aware of their rights and duties and subordinated to the good of society. Analyzing the relations between the citizen and the authorities, he indicated that the Holy See fights for civil rights within states. In this sense, he saw great value in relations between states and the Holy See. The quoted study should be considered an important

²²Wojciech Kucharski, "Polish-Vatican Talks During the Pontificate of Paul VI (1965–1974): An analysis of the negotiation model," *Journal of Cold War Studies* (forthcoming).

²³Stefan Zuzelski, *Stolica Apostolska a świat powojenny* (Włocławek, Poland: Księgarnia Powszechna, 1945).

²⁴*Ibid.*, 36.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 61.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 65–68.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 64: "Należy odnieść zwycięstwo nad zdradliwą zasadą, że użyteczność jest regułą prawa, że siła tworzy prawo."

voice in defense of concordat regimes functioning in many Catholic countries, and even constituting an important element of their constitutional order.²⁸

Undoubtedly, Stefan Wyszyński was an opponent of the “breaking” of the concordat, as he saw in it the systemic protection of the rights of the church. He did not realize then that the decision of the authorities was hasty and, apart from a number of benefits, also brought about side effects in the form of losing influence on the appointment of episcopal positions. This, in turn, opened the way for him as the chairman of the Polish episcopate, who had special papal powers to shape the composition of the Polish episcopate for 30 years following the war. Incidentally, it can be added that later, when the method of regulating the relations between Poland and the Holy See was considered, as primate he expressed doubts as to the effectiveness of breaking the concordat.²⁹

From the perspective of the Holy See, the decision of the authorities in Warsaw was not binding, as the then-government was not considered to represent a party to the concordat agreement (the Holy See maintained relations with the Polish government-in-exile in London). This problem touched Father Wyszyński during his nomination to the bishop’s seat in Lublin. In accordance with article XI of the concordat of 1925, in 1946 the Secretariat of State, through Ambassador Kazimierz Papée, asked for the consent of the President of the Republic of Poland, Władysław Raczkiewicz, who was resident in London, for this appointment.³⁰ It should also be added that, for Pius XII, the concordat was one of the key tools in the implementation of international politics. As Giuliana Chamedes has recently shown, this did not change even after 1945.³¹ At the same time, it can be stated that despite the unclear status of the concordat in Poland (this concerns the legal question of whether the law sanctioning the concordat could be abolished by a government resolution), both parties—the Holy See and People’s Poland—behaved as if the concordat did not *de facto* apply.

IV. Involvement of Stefan Wyszyński, Primate of Poland, in the Normalization of Polish–Vatican Relations, 1950–1965

Archbishop Wyszyński started his tenure as the Archbishop of Warsaw and Gniezno during the non-concordat regime. An attempt to fill the gap that arose after the “breaking” of the concordat was the agreement concluded between the government and the episcopate of April 14, 1950.³² One of the important goals of the agreement was to enshrine in Polish legislation the rights of the Holy See with regard to the Church in

²⁸In the initial postwar years, the communist authorities in Poland recognized as binding the Constitution of 1921, which in Article 114 directly referred to the concordat: “The Roman Catholic Church is governed by its own laws. The relationship of the State to the Church will be determined on the basis of an agreement with the Holy See, which is subject to ratification by the *Sejm*.” However, for the position in the constitution of 1935, see K. Szwarzenberg-Czerny, “Problem konkordatu polskiego,” *Przegląd Powszechny*, no. 225 (1948): 4–14.

²⁹Peter Raina, *Kardynał Wyszyński. Czasy Prymasowskie 1967–1968* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo von borowiecky, 1998), 51.

³⁰Kazimierz Papée to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in London, April 24, 1946, Papieski Instytut Studiów Kościelnych (PISK), Aamb. RPSA, ref. 40, sheet 11, Code No. 16.

³¹Giuliana Chamedes, *A Twentieth-Century Crusade. The Vatican’s Battle to Remake Christian Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 248.

³²For information about the agreement itself and the negotiations connected with it, see Jan Żaryn, *Kościół a władza w Polsce (1945–1950)* (Warszawa: DIG, 1997), 249–265.

Poland. The key article of this document was this: "The principle that the Pope is the governor and supreme authority of the Church applies to faith, morals and ecclesiastical jurisdiction, while in other matters the Episcopate is guided by the Polish *raison d'état*."³³ Although the agreement itself was adopted by the Holy See "with sadness,"³⁴ and the primate clearly emphasized that it was not an "accord" or *modus vivendi*, it seems that the intention of the Polish episcopate was to clearly indicate that, in matters of the Roman Catholic Church, they would not be regulated solely by domestic legislation and required a relationship with the papacy. The primate explained this point of view in a letter to the Secretariat of State:

From the beginning of our talks with the Government, the Episcopate knew that the Government did not intend to negotiate with the Holy See, that it was not heading towards a concordat or *modus vivendi*. Nor was there any intention to bring about an arrangement that would guarantee the rights of the Holy Church, in accordance with the Code of Canon Law. . . . Knowing that, we had one thing left: to defend what can be defended. . . . The more so as the same Polish Government, which did not intend to establish relations with the Holy See, expressed its readiness to talk to the Polish Episcopate.³⁵

And regarding the above-mentioned point five of the agreement, he wrote:

After long debates, it was possible to persuade the communist government to recognize the supreme authority of the Pope in matters of faith, morals and ecclesiastical jurisdiction (p. 5). However respected this point may be, it will remain in history a fact that the communists recognized it. Today we have something to refer to whenever we are accused of postulates that exceed our competence. . . . This gives us the right to appeal to the Holy See in matters of *gravioris momenti*. When we consider that in other countries the mere contact with the Holy See amounts to espionage, in Poland we can defend ourselves against this accusation in point 5 of the declaration.³⁶

³³Ibid., 233: "Zasada, że Papież jest miarodajnym i najwyższym autorytetem Kościoła, odnosi się do wiary, moralności oraz jurysdykcji kościelnej, w innych natomiast sprawach Episkopat kieruje się polską racją stanu."

³⁴Upon hearing about this, Msgr Tardini is reported to have said: "*Mi sono addolorato*" ("I am overwhelmed by pain"); Żaryn, *Kościół a władza*, 335. On the topic of the dangers connected with the agreement noted by the Holy See, see Kucharski, *Komuniści*, 129–130.

³⁵Jan Żaryn, "Nieznany list prymasa Polski Stefana Wyszyńskiego do Stolicy Apostolskiej w sprawie tzw. porozumienia z rządem z 14 kwietnia 1950 roku," *Polska 1944/45–1989. Studia i Materiały* 2 (1996): 300–301: "Od początku swych rozmów z Rządem Episkopat wiedział, że Rząd nie zamierza prowadzić układów ze Stolicą świętą, że do konkordatu, czy *modus vivendi* nie zdąży. Nie ma też zamiaru doprowadzić do takiego układu, który gwarantowałby prawa Kościoła świętego, zgodnie z Kodeksem Prawa Kanonicznego. . . . Wiedząc o tym, pozostało nam jedno: bronić tego, co się da obronić. . . . Tym bardziej, że ten sam Rząd polski, który nie zamierzał nawiązywać stosunków ze Stolicą świętą wyrażał gotowość rozmawiania z Episkopatem polskim."

³⁶Ibid., 301–302: "Po długich debatach udało się skłonić Rząd komunistyczny do uznania najwyższego autorytetu Papieża w sprawach wiary, moralności i jurysdykcji kościelnej (p. 5). Jakkolwiek byłby ten punkt respektowany, pozostanie w dziejach faktem, że komuniści to uznali. Dziś mamy już na co się powołać, ilekroć zarzucani jesteśmy postulatami, które przekraczają naszą kompetencję. . . . Daje nam to prawo odwołania się do Stolicy świętej w sprawach *gravioris momenti*. Gdy się zważy, że w innych krajach sam

During the first months after the signing of the agreement, it became clear that, despite the provisions, the authorities clearly sought to “loosen” the relations between the Church in Poland and Rome. Franciszek Mazur, member of the *Sejm* and member of the Polish United Workers’ Party, said this up front on March 5, 1951, in an interview with Bishop Zygmunt Choromański:

It would not hurt you to have a fight with Rome. It was like that in history. The Germans are making waves in Rome. I am warning you once again. Don’t make us make drastic moves. We do not want to get into the internal affairs of the Church. But if something is against the interests of the State, then the internal affairs of the Church are not taboo for us. If Rome doesn’t want to help, don’t ask Rome. You have to separate yourself from Rome. You are stuck in a difficult position. Be a little braver.³⁷

The primate saw this threat. It is possible that precisely for this reason, in the spring of 1951, he undertook to sound out the possibility of starting Polish–Vatican talks.³⁸ We have information on this subject from indirect sources.³⁹ According to the primate’s account, this was an initiative of Polish bishops who wanted to appoint a representative of the Vatican in Warsaw.⁴⁰ From the notes of Bolesław Bierut, the First Secretary of Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party, it appears that after returning from the Vatican in May 1951, Primate Wyszyński raised the issue of “a possible visit to Poland under the guise of a Church mission of a Vatican representative who would have powers of attorney for appropriate talks with the Polish government on normalizing mutual relations between Poland and the Vatican.”⁴¹ According to the reports of the ambassador of the USSR in Warsaw, Arkady Sobolev, and the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, Valerian Zorin, Bierut consulted on the matter in Moscow and finally obtained approval from Joseph Stalin⁴² to start talks, with the only reservation being that the negotiations were

kontakt ze Stolicą świętą równa się uprawianiu szpiegostwa, w Polsce przeciwko temu zarzutowi bronić się możemy punktem 5 deklaracji.”

³⁷Peter Raina, *Kościół w PRL. Kościół katolicki a państwo w świetle dokumentów 1945–1989* (Poznań, Poland: Wydawnictwo W drodze, 1994), vol. 1, 289: “Nie zaszkodziłoby byście się trochę pokłócili z Rzymem. Było tak w historii. Niemcy robią awantury w Rzymie. Jeszcze raz was przestrzegam. Nie zmuszajcie nas do drastycznych posunięć. Nie chcemy wchodzić w wewnętrzne sprawy Kościoła. Ale jeżeli coś jest sprzeczne z interesem Państwa, to sprawy wewnętrzne Kościoła nie są dla nas tabu. Rzym nie chce, to nie pytajcie Rzymu. Musicie się raz odrąbać. Ugrzęźliście na ciężkiej pozycji. Trochę więcej śmiałości.”

³⁸Kucharski, *Komuniści*, 139.

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰Stefan Wyszyński, *Pro memoria* 1953, vol. 2, ed. Ewa K. Czaczkowska (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego, 2017), 21.

⁴¹J. Chyliński, *Jaki był Bolesław Bierut. Wspomnienia syna* (Warszawa: Oficyna Drukarska, 1999), 184.

⁴²Notes from the diary of the ambassador of the USSR in Warsaw, Arkady Sobolev, about the progress of talks with Bolesław Bierut related to the visit of Primate Stefan Wyszyński to Rome and the situation in the PZPR, May 8, 1951, in *Polska w dokumentach z archiwów rosyjskich 1949–1953*, ed. A. Kochański [and others], trans. Ewa Rosowska (Warszawa: ISP PAN, 2000), 105, footnote 5; Notes from the diary of the ambassador of the USSR in Warsaw, Arkady Sobolev, about the progress of talks with Bolesław Bierut related to the arrest of Władysław Gomułka, relations with the Vatican, and other matters, June 4, 1951, in *Ibid.*, 118; Letter from the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, Valerian Zorin, to Joseph Stalin in connection with the proposition from the Vatican on establishing relations with the USSR and

conducted on behalf of only Poland and not of other People's Democratic countries.⁴³ According to the ambassador of the USSR, the Polish authorities were to inform the primate that they agreed to a special mission of the Vatican to come to Warsaw to negotiate the conclusion of a permanent agreement between Poland and the Vatican.⁴⁴ The Polish bishops wanted to inform the Pope about this through a special envoy.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, we do not know what happened with this. However, it is known that this had no effect. There is also no basis on which to formulate hypotheses about the reasons for stopping possible negotiations with the Vatican.

It seems that the communists in Warsaw were then ready to completely break with Rome and strip the Pope of any competences with regard to the affairs of the Church in Poland. Reading these intentions, the Primate noted after a conversation with the MP Mazur: "Moreover, one can sense the danger of a schism."⁴⁶ Therefore, after a meeting of the Main Episcopal Commission, the bishops adopted the following resolutions: "As regards the way of agreeing on candidates for episcopal seats, the right of the Holy See to the »terno« must be firmly defended. . . . The Main Commission is firmly against our being scared with the prospect of our being cut off from contacts with Rome. The Polish Church only with Rome."⁴⁷

In the following years, until Władysław Gomułka came to power in October 1956, the Polish government did not take steps to normalize Polish–Vatican relations, and during the primate's internment (1953–1956), the Polish Church was almost completely isolated from the Holy See.⁴⁸

Between October 1956 and October 1958, we find a fairly large amount of information from survey activities concerning Polish–Vatican relations undertaken by both sides.⁴⁹ The most serious attempt at investigating the possibility of negotiating was made by Cardinal Wyszyński at the request of Władysław Gomułka, the new First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party. On April 30, 1957, the Political Bureau passed a resolution obliging Józef Cyrankiewicz and Władysław Gomułka to meet with Primate Wyszyński and put forward a proposal to conclude a concordat.⁵⁰ After the meeting, the primate noted the following information in *Pro memoria*:

people's democratic countries, June 19, 1951, in *Ibid.*, 108; Joseph Stalin's instructions to Bolesław Bierut on relations with the Vatican, June 25, 1951, in *Ibid.*, 110.

⁴³*Polska w dokumentach z archiwów rosyjskich*, 109, footnote 3.

⁴⁴Notes from the diary of the ambassador of the USSR in Warsaw, Arkady Sobolev, about the progress of talks with Bolesław Bierut related to the arrest of Władysław Gomułka, relations with the Vatican and other matters, June 4, 1951, in *Ibid.*, 118.

⁴⁵Wyszyński, *Pro memoria* 1953, 21.

⁴⁶Stefan Wyszyński, *Pro memoria 1948–1952*, vol. 1, ed. P. Skibiński (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego, 2017), 190: "Nadto wyczuwa się niebezpieczeństwo schizmy."

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 190–191: "W sprawie sposobu uzgadniania kandydatur na stolice biskupie trzeba stanowczo bronić prawa Stolicy Świętej do terno. . . Komisja Główna zastrzega się stanowczo przeciwko straszeniu nas perspektywą oderwania od kontaktów z Rzymem. Kościół polski tylko z Rzymem."

⁴⁸Kucharski, *Komuniści*, 148–158.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 178–204.

⁵⁰Protocol No. 163 of the meeting of the Politburo on April 30, 1957, Archive of New Documents (AAN), Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, Office of the First Secretary, ref. XIA/182, sheet 206.

At the end of the conversation, Mr Gomułka proposed a permanent determination of the relations between the Church and the state in the form of a concordat. "We will have a long, long time to live side by side," said Mr G[omułka], "it is useful for the mutual relationship to be permanently established. It is obvious that Poland is communist and a concordat would be concluded with such a Poland. It is worth putting this thought to the Vatican, let it develop."⁵¹

During his stay in Rome, the primate met several times with officials of the Secretariat of State: Archbishop Antonio Samorè (May 11, May 23, June 14), Msgr Domenico Tardini (May 15, June 15), Msgr Luigi Poggi (May 15, May 22, May 31, June 1, June 11), Msgr Angelo Dell'Acqua (May 16), but he did not mention the concordat until June 1.⁵² He held the most important talks on Polish–Vatican relations with Pius XII on May 14 and June 13.⁵³ During the second conversation with Pius XII, he took up the subject of the Polish government's proposal for a concordat and the establishment of diplomatic relations between Poland and the Holy See. He added, "I would prefer that there was someone on behalf of the Holy See in Warsaw."⁵⁴ The primate was afraid that he would be perceived as a "megaphone of communist plans," but at the same time this proposal was in his own interests. This was not only because of the more concrete support from the pope, which he would be able to obtain thanks to there being a representative of the Holy See in Poland, but also, it seems, it would avoid accusations formulated in the Vatican against the Polish hierarchs that they were not acting in accordance with the Holy See's expectations.⁵⁵ According to the primate's account, Pius XII completely rejected the possibility of signing a concordat with the communist government: "A concordat with a communist government may be misunderstood in other countries, it may be an incentive to the freedom of communism."⁵⁶ On the other hand, regarding the representative of the Vatican in Warsaw, the Pope said: "It is His Eminence who is there, who sees all, observes and informs. We trust him completely."⁵⁷ A day later, Domenico Tardini was to present to the primate points that must be taken into account as essential before negotiating with the communists.⁵⁸ It is possible that these were the guidelines for negotiating the establishment of relations. The primate reported the details of his talks in the Vatican to Gomułka on January 9, 1958.⁵⁹ These activities did not bring any tangible results at that time. It

⁵¹Stefan Wyszyński, *Pro memoria 1956–1957*, vol. 4, ed. M. Białkowski and M. Wiśniewska (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego, 2020), 212: "Pod koniec rozmowy pan Gomułka wystąpił z projektem trwałego określenia stosunków między K[ościółem] a państwem w postaci konkordatu. «Wypadnie nam jeszcze długo, długo żyć obok siebie – mówił p. G[omułka] – pożyteczną jest rzeczą, aby stosunek wzajemny był określony stale. Oczywiście rzecz, że Polska jest ludowa i z taką Polską byłby zawierany konkordat. Warto tę myśl rzucić w Watykanie, niech się rozwija»."

⁵²*Ibid.*, 227, 233, 234, 262, 263, 278, 287, 289, 290.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 282.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*: "Wolałbym, by w W[arszawie] był ktoś z ramienia Stolicy Świętej."

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 283: "Konkordat z rządem komunistycznym może być źle zrozumiany w innych krajach, może być zachętą do swobody kom[unizmu]."

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 282: "To przecież tam jest eminenca, który to wszystko widzi, patrzy i informuje. My całkowicie mu ufamy."

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 289.

⁵⁹Stefan Wyszyński, *Pro memoria 1958*, vol. 5, ed. M. Krupecka (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego, 2018), 20–21.

must be added that this occurred in parallel with the tightening of the party line toward the Church in Poland.

The change in the See of Peter in 1958 was of significant importance for Polish–Vatican relations and, more broadly, those between the Holy See with the countries of the Soviet sphere of influence: Pope John XXIII replaced Pius XII. This change was immediately noticed and quite positively received among the leaders of the Eastern bloc.⁶⁰ For the primate, it meant strengthening his position in the Vatican. The *aggiornamento* initiated by John XXIII went hand in hand with changes in the Vatican's eastern policy.⁶¹ At this point, it can be signaled that with the development of the Vatican's *Ostpolitik*, sealed with successive agreements and "achievements," the primate's skepticism toward Vatican diplomats dealing with communism grew.⁶² This distance was not only due to criticism of Vatican diplomacy, but also based on his own experience. The primate twice concluded agreements with the communists in Warsaw (1950 and 1956), but they did not guarantee the church's rights. The primate repeatedly emphasized the different understanding and respect for the law in the West and in communist states.⁶³

The *détente* of John XXIII, especially during the Cuban crisis in 1962, gave the authorities in Warsaw hope for a new arrangement of relations with the Vatican. As early as December 1962, Władysław Gomułka's closest associate, head of the PZPR parliamentary club in the *Sejm* and deputy speaker of the *Sejm*, Zenon Kliszko at the Gramsci Institute in Rome, mentioned the possibility of signing a concordat in the future.⁶⁴ The primate, however, distanced himself from this idea, pointing out that the state–church relationship did not look as good as the authorities tried to portray it abroad.⁶⁵ He emphasized this in an interview with Władysław Gomułka on April 26, 1963. He confirmed that he wanted a concordat, but first set out conditions (he mentioned that he explained these issues in Rome to Zenon Kliszko).⁶⁶ It concerned a real change in the state's policy toward the church, that is, guaranteeing the teaching of religion and guaranteeing the autonomy of seminaries and the Catholic University of Lublin, limiting the conscription of seminarians to the army, and not restricting religious building construction.⁶⁷ The cardinal assumed a gradual establishment of relations. At the outset, he hoped that an inspector or a representative not of diplomatic rank could come to Poland, and only after all matters had been settled, would diplomatic relations be established.⁶⁸ Two weeks later, he presented his position in detail to the ambassador of the People's Republic of Poland in Rome, Adam Willmann. Referring to press speculation about the establishment of a "Vatican consulate" in Warsaw, he said:

⁶⁰Kucharski, *Komuniści*, 205–241.

⁶¹Barberini, *L'Ostpolitik della Santa Sede*, 53.

⁶²Grajewski, "Kardynał Stefan Wyszyński."

⁶³*Ibid.*, 66.

⁶⁴See Peter Raina, *Kardynał Wyszyński. Czasy Prymasowskie 1962–1963* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Książka Polska, 1994), vol. 4, 111.

⁶⁵Stefan Wyszyński, *Pro memoria 1962*, vol. 9, ed. A. Poniński (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego, 2020), 333–334, 341–343, 348, 349.

⁶⁶Raina, *Kardynał Wyszyński. Czasy Prymasowskie 1962–1963*, 107; cf. Eleonora Syzdek, ed., "Rozmowa Prymasa Polski ks. kard. Stefana Wyszyńskiego z I Sekretarzem KC PZPR Władysławem Gomułką w dniu 26 kwietnia 1963 roku," *Więź* (March 1995): 131–132.

⁶⁷Syzdek, "Rozmowa," 133–140.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 133.

The proposal for a consulate does not correspond to the international prestige of Poland or its historical relations with the Vatican. A number of appropriate international steps should be undertaken that would create an atmosphere in which it would be natural to establish full diplomatic relations and establish a first-class nunciature in Warsaw, such as exists in Paris or similar capitals. As a rule, *nuncios* in Poland have later been appointed cardinals, and some have become popes.⁶⁹

As a result of the talks with Władysław Gomułka, the primate again presented the Secretariat of State the proposal from the Polish authorities to start negotiations. From the note of Msgr Samoré, drawn up after meeting with Cardinal Wyszyński on May 17, 1963, it follows that the Holy See was then ready to start talks. The key condition for the negotiations was to guarantee the possibility of consulting the primate and keeping the talks secret. It was then assumed that the purpose of the talks could not be a concordat. First, there would have to be intermediate stages—that is, sending an inspector to Poland, then a delegate, and only then agreeing on a *modus vivendi* and an agreement. In line with the primate's expectations, it was assumed that any agreement would have to include the most important church postulates, including guarantees of religious freedom in Poland.⁷⁰

Given that the religious policy in Poland did not improve, the primate suspended his commitment to the normalization of Polish–Vatican relations for over a year. During that period, an unexpected initiative was undertaken by Catholic activists associated with the “Znak” parliamentary circle, and in the fall of 1963, they sent a document entitled the *Opinion of the “Znak” Catholic Community to the Holy See Regarding Relations between the State and the Church and the Regulation of Relations between the People’s Republic of Poland and the Holy See*.⁷¹ The *Opinion* presented an honest balance between the state and the church, pointing to the antichurch policy in Poland and positively assessing the role of the church in international *détente*.⁷² However, the members of parliament suggested that both sides in the “conflict”—the government and the episcopate—were equally responsible for the state of these relations. The solution, according to them, was to include an international, neutral actor, which would be the Holy See, within the framework of the state–church relationship.⁷³ In addition, as if in passing, the *Opinion* suggested that the Polish bishops separate the local church from modernist tendencies in the universal church, which could be prevented by the existence of diplomatic representation of the Holy See in Warsaw: “This representation of the Holy

⁶⁹Cryptogram No. 6177 from Adam Willmann to Mieczysław Łobodycz, Rome, May 11, 1963, Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych (hereinafter: AMSZ), Zespół Depesz [hereafter ZD], l. 107, vol. 621, sheet 277: “Propozycja konsulatów nie odpowiada międzynarodowemu prestiżowi Polski ani jej historycznym stosunkom z Watykanem. Należy dokonywać szeregu odpowiednich aktów zewnętrznych, które stworzyłyby taką atmosferę, w której naturalnym będzie nawiązanie pełnych stosunków dyplomatycznych i ustalenie w Warszawie nuncjatury I klasy, jak na przykład w Paryżu czy podobnych mu stolicach. Nuncjusze w Polsce byli z reguły potem mianowani kardynałami, a niektórzy zostawali papieżami.”

⁷⁰Appunto di Mons. Samoré sul suo colloquio con li Card. Wyszyński, May 20, 1963, in *La politica del dialogo. Le carte Casaroli sull’Ostpolitik vaticana*, ed. Giovanni Barberini (Bologna, Italy: Il Mulino, 2008), 564.

⁷¹Text of the *Opinion*, see Andrzej Friszke, *Koło posłów „Znak” w Sejmie PRL 1957–1976* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 2002), 411–416.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 55.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 415.

Father in Poland would facilitate contacts with the central authority in Rome and would necessarily incorporate Polish Catholicism more effectively into the general organism of the Church.⁷⁴ The authors of the *Opinion* were aware that establishing a relationship would be a long process and did not mention the role in this process of the episcopate headed by the primate, who after all had special papal powers. They rejected Cardinal Wyszyński's strategy, which had first assumed the regulation of all religious issues in Poland, and only then the full normalization of Poland–Vatican relations. It seems, however, that for the primate, the most serious objection was isolating Polish Catholics from contacts with the Holy See and obstructing the changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council. The document caused the most serious crisis in relations between the Znak community and the primate. In December 1963, the primate was surprised to receive the text of the *Opinion* from the Secretariat of State and interpreted it as an attempt to undermine his authority and as a sign of the disloyalty of the entire community centered around Znak.

In early December 1963, Cardinal Wyszyński met with Msgr Luigi Poggi, to whom he presented the position of the episcopate on the agreement between the Holy See and the Polish government.⁷⁵ In his memo, Poggi emphasized that there were clear tendencies indicating the readiness of the Polish authorities to start talks on the agreement. Apart from the statements of Władysław Gomułka and Zenon Kliszko on this subject, various "opinions" formulated by circles loyal to the authorities were also said to be significant proof. In these activities, the role of the episcopate was marginalized, and it was even suggested that the Polish bishops were against the agreement, wrote the Vatican diplomat.⁷⁶ The primate denied this information. At the same time, he drew attention to the risk of concluding an agreement with communists and the conditions under which negotiations would be conducted. He also pointed to important internal circumstances, including the economic crisis and the relations between the state and the church, that influenced the tactics used by the authorities. The primate declared that he would be happy to see the Apostolic *Nuncio* in Warsaw, but he warned against the "pragmatic" approach of the government to the principle of *pacta sunt servanda*. He strongly emphasized that the authorities wanted to exclude bishops from the negotiation process. According to the primate, the key question was who would lead the negotiations. He warned against "Catholics dependent on the regime" on the one hand and diplomats "not expert in dealing with communists" (here I understand he meant papal diplomats) on the other.⁷⁷ He suggested that the best solution would be for the Polish Episcopate to delegate representatives from among its members to make contact between the government and the Holy See.⁷⁸ As a precondition for starting negotiations, he indicated the suspension of repression against the church and a significant relaxation of antichurch policy.⁷⁹

In April 1964, after a four-month break, the Cardinal agreed to meet the Znak deputies and explain the problems.⁸⁰ Half a year later, in the fall of 1964, he decided to

⁷⁴Ibid., 416: "Przedstawicielstwo Ojca Świętego w Polsce ułatwiłoby kontakty z centralną władzą w Rzymie i siłą rzeczy włączyłoby skuteczniej katolicyzm polski w ogólny organizm Kościoła."

⁷⁵Esposito del Card. Wyszyński circa eventuale accordo tra Santa Sede e Governo polacco in un Appunto di Mons. Poggi, in *La politica del dialogo*, 567–571.

⁷⁶Ibid., 567.

⁷⁷Ibid., 568: "Chi non, esperto di relazioni coi comunisti."

⁷⁸Ibid., 569.

⁷⁹Ibid., 568.

⁸⁰Friszke, *Koło posłów*, 56–57.

support the mission of the leader of this community, Jerzy Zawieyski, who had been commissioned by Władysław Gomułka to communicate to the Holy See the readiness of the Polish authorities to start Polish–Vatican talks. The primate made it possible for Zawieyski to discuss all matters in the Secretariat of State first, and later he led him to an audience with Paul VI.⁸¹ As expected by the primate, Archbishop Antonio Samorè set out only two conditions for possible Polish–Vatican talks during the conversation with the leader of Znak on November 19: that the Polish episcopate and Cardinal Wyszyński agreed to the negotiations and that they should be conducted in secret. In his *Diaries*, Zawieyski noted: “I was dazzled and somewhat amazed by their unconditional readiness.”⁸² These conditions were confirmed during the audience by Paul VI, who added that he had talked about this with Primate Wyszyński.⁸³

A few days later, the ambassador met with the primate, who emphasized that the Vatican treated talks with the People’s Republic of Poland as international negotiations of a very important nature. He recalled that for their success it is extremely important to maintain discretion, especially with regard to the dioceses in the western territories.⁸⁴

V. Cardinal Wyszyński on the Polish–Vatican Talks, 1965–1974

As a result of Jerzy Zawieyski’s visit, unofficial Polish–Vatican talks, conducted by official representatives, began at the beginning of 1965. The Polish side was represented by the ambassador of the People’s Republic of Poland in Rome, Adam Willmann, and the Holy See by Msgr Agostino Casaroli, then-undersecretary in the Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs.⁸⁵ It should be added that Poland started official talks quite late. Let us note that this was the moment when the agreement between the Holy See and Hungary (1964) was signed, the Vatican–Czechoslovak and Vatican–Yugoslav talks were already underway, and contacts had even been made with representatives of the USSR.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the starting state of the negotiations was quite different in Poland compared to the other communist countries.⁸⁷ This was connected to the religious structure and the bishops’ freedom of action. In the mid-1960s, over 90 percent of Polish citizens declared themselves to be Catholics, and all dioceses were headed by independent bishops or bishops with the rights of resident bishops. By comparison, when the negotiations began in Hungary only six out of eleven dioceses were governed by bishops ordinary, and in Czechoslovakia, it was even worse: in thirteen dioceses, only three in Slovakia were headed by ordained bishops.⁸⁸ All this meant

⁸¹See Kucharski, *Komuniści*, 289–293.

⁸²Jerzy Zawieyski, *Dzienniki*, ed. Agnieszka Knyt and Magdalena Czoch (Warszawa: Ośrodek Karta, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2012), vol. 2, 439: “Byłem olśniony i nieco zdumiony gotowością tak bezwarunkową.”

⁸³*Ibid.*, 442–446.

⁸⁴Cryptogram No, 14239 from Rome on November 30, 1964, from Adam Willmann to Zenon Kliszko, AMSZ, ZD 6/77, l. 130, vol. 703, sheet 560.

⁸⁵Kucharski, *Komuniści*, 294–297.

⁸⁶Casaroli, *Pamiętniki*, 86–95, 111–119, 162–175; András Fejérdy, “The Holy See’s Negotiations with Budapest and Prague (1963–1978): Criteria for a Comparative Analysis,” in Fejérdy, *The Vatican «Ostpolitik»*, 183–206; Nadezhda Belyakova, *The Ostpolitik of Pope Paul VI: Soviet Sources and Research Perspectives*, in *Ibid.*, 113–132; Emilia Hrabovec, *The Vatican Ostpolitik and Czechoslovakia. National Aspects of the Political-Ecclesiastical Negotiations*, in *Ibid.*, 207–237.

⁸⁷Kramer, “The Vatican’s Ostpolitik,” 284.

⁸⁸Fejérdy, “The Holy See’s Negotiations,” 189.

that the issue of arranging Polish–Vatican relations was not treated as pressing on the part of the Primate and the Holy See. Casaroli wrote this directly, recalling the sentence attributed to Pius XII: “Poland will do it by itself.”⁸⁹

So why did the primate support the government’s initiative? It seems to me that, just like the authorities in Warsaw, he counted on a faster solution to the problem of the dioceses in the Western and Northern Territories (from the authorities’ point of view, this was about the border on the Oder and Neisse, and from the Primate’s perspective, the canonical stabilization of Church structures). As for the rest of the matter, the Primate had no illusions.

Note that during the first meeting between Ambassador Willmann and Msgr Agostino Casaroli, the Polish side put forward only one condition: “recognition of the borders by the Vatican through the official appointment of Polish Church administration in the regained territories [sic].”⁹⁰ This condition, according to the then-interpretation of the Holy See, turned out to be prohibitive. Nevertheless, Casaroli did his best to maintain at least working contact with the Polish authorities.

The primate’s desire to organize the pilgrimage of Pope Paul VI to Poland in 1966 in connection with the celebrations of the millennium of Christianity in Poland had a certain significance for Polish–Vatican contacts.⁹¹ Unfortunately, the pilgrimage did not take place, because the authorities closed the border for a year to all representatives of the church hierarchy after the Polish bishops addressed the famous *Message* to the German bishops of November 18, 1965.⁹² This document was meant to contribute to reconciliation with Germany and, consequently, to solve the problem of the Polish–German border and to the establishment of permanent Polish dioceses in the former German territories incorporated into Poland after World War II. However, the authorities interpreted this as meddling by bishops in Polish foreign policy, which was the exclusive domain of the government and the Communist Party. Despite the behind-the-scenes diplomatic efforts, the pilgrimage did not take place.⁹³ However, the primate had the opportunity at the end of 1966 to present to Casaroli, who had come to Poland for informal negotiations with the government, his point of view on regulating relations with the state. He indicated that the authorities might not fulfill any obligations toward the Holy See, as in the case of the agreements with the episcopate of 1950 and 1956. He clearly emphasized that the situation in Poland was different from that in Hungary, Yugoslavia, or Czechoslovakia, and the Secretariat of State must take into account the fact that the designators of such concepts as law, state, freedom, and common good are different in the Vatican and in a communist state. Even then he

⁸⁹Casaroli, *Pamiętniki*, 195.

⁹⁰Protocol No. 11 from the meeting of the Political Bureau of February 16, 1965, AAN, Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party, Political Bureau, ref V/79, sheet 82: “Uznanie granic przez Watykan poprzez oficjalne mianowanie polskiej administracji kościelnej na ziemiach odzyskanych [sic].”

⁹¹Wojciech Kucharski, “Wielki nieobecny. Kwestia udziału papieża Pawła VI w obchodach milenijnych w Polsce,” in *Pół wieku Milenium. Religijne, polityczne i społeczne aspekty obchodów Tysiąclecia Chrztu Polski (1956–1966/1967)*, ed. Bartłomiej Noszczak (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2017), 391–411.

⁹²For more on this topic, see Wojciech Kucharski, *Listy milenijne* (Wrocław: Ośrodek Pamięć i Przyszłość, 2020), 140–154. On the *Message* itself, see Wojciech Kucharski, “Orędzie biskupów polskich do biskupów niemieckich. Podsumowanie badań, nowe ustalenia i perspektywy badawcze,” in *Kardynał Bolesław Kominek, biskup dyplomata wizjoner*, eds. Wojciech Kucharski and Rafał Łatka (Wrocław: Ośrodek Pamięć i Przyszłość, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2020), 89–137.

⁹³Kucharski, *Wielki*.

argued that one should not set off from a minimalist position, because an agreement with one socialist state may become a starting point for other states negotiating with the Holy See, and because then there is nothing to give up in negotiations. The primate believed that such a mistake had been made in negotiations with the Yugoslav authorities.⁹⁴ Based on the entry in the diary *Pro memoria*, it is clear that it was the primate who proposed sending to Poland a papal “special mission” for two to three months, which would find out about the situation, and talk to bishops, politicians, and lay Catholics.⁹⁵

Such a mission, headed by Casaroli, arrived in Poland two and a half months later (it lasted, with breaks, from February 14 to April 7, 1967). As it turned out, this idea was also useful for the Party leadership, which counted on gaining a partner in the Secretariat of State to solve problems in the relations between the state and the Church in Poland, thus bypassing the episcopate and the primate. It seems that, at that time, the possibility of signing an agreement with the Vatican was seriously considered.⁹⁶ In the mid-1960s, the relations between the state and the church were so complicated and tense that, apart from solving current issues, it was difficult to prepare the authorities to discuss the systemic regulation of religious issues, taking into account the expectations of the church (although at the end of 1966, meetings of the Joint Commission restarted).

The Polish–Vatican talks provided an opportunity for the primate to place the postulates of the Polish episcopate on the negotiating table. In November, he presented Casaroli with a comprehensive document containing the “maximal” proposals to regulate the relationship between the state and the church.⁹⁷ This concept was based on guaranteeing the church a number of freedoms, but above all granting the Church in Poland legal identity and anchoring potential agreements in international law. Casaroli used these postulates when formulating church expectations toward the Polish authorities.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, the main proposal he made at that time was to establish diplomatic relations before signing any agreement.⁹⁹

It seems to me that the primate was then against such a concept. That is, in line with the strategy adopted earlier, it assumed first regulating internal affairs and then establishing relations. He was also quite skeptical about the durability of any agreements with the Polish authorities. Toward the end of Casaroli’s mission, he wrote on the subject in *Pro memoria*: “What if the government proposes talks? My answer: these talks cannot be refused. . . ; As far as an *accordo* is concerned – talks should be extended . . . ; When it comes to the concordat, one must first realize the binding force of the 1925 Concordat, which is unilaterally broken by the Government . . . ; Guarantees – are they possible? Actually none; . . . Joint Commission [of the episcopate and the government—W.K.]? – Yes! Representative of the Holy See? – Yes!”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴Stefan Wyszyński, “Pro memoria”, November 24, 1966; November 25, 1966, manuscript Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Gnieźnie [hereafter AAGn.], cf Appunto di Mons. Casaroli sull’incontro con li Card. Wyszyński e su eventuali trattative con il Governo, December 2, 1966, in *La politica del dialogo*, 602–605.

⁹⁵Stefan Wyszyński, “Pro memoria,” November 25, 1966, AAGn.

⁹⁶Kucharski, *Komuniści*, 330.

⁹⁷Proposte riguardi la Chiesa e lo Stato (Massime)/Maksymalne/, in *La politica del dialogo*, 606–609.

⁹⁸Kucharski, *Komuniści*, 336.

⁹⁹Ibid., 335–336.

¹⁰⁰Peter Raina, *Kardynał Wyszyński. Czasy Prymasowskie 1967–1968* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo von borowiecky, 1998), vol. 8, 51: “Co, jeśli rząd wystąpi z propozycją rozmów? Odpowiedź moja: nie można odmówić tych rozmów. . . ; Gdy idzie o *accordo* – rozmowy powinny być przedłużane . . . ; Gdy idzie o

It can be assumed that the primate did not realize that the authorities were formulating only two postulates at that time: the removal of the primate and a positive declaration by the Vatican regarding the Western Territories.¹⁰¹ After analyzing the postulates put forward by Casaroli, the party leadership decided not to engage in “dialogue at the level proposed by Casaroli,” but it delayed communicating this decision to the Vatican diplomats.¹⁰² The visit ended without tangible results. Despite the fact that both sides were satisfied with its course, the authorities suspended further negotiations on the grounds that there had been no change in the “primate’s attitude.”¹⁰³ The suspension lasted over three years.¹⁰⁴

It is surprising that after a three-year break, it was in fact Cardinal Wyszyński, during his visit to the Vatican in the fall of 1970, who suggested that the pope should start talks through the Holy See with the government of the People’s Republic of Poland, and although the pope was skeptical, the primate indicated that “it would be a sign of good will.” The primate presented his point of view in detail during a conversation with Archbishop Agostino Casaroli:

They have long accused us of stopping agreement between the Vatican and the government of the People’s Republic of Poland. These are the accusations made by Pax [Catholics cooperating with the communists; author’s note]. We gave our answer, mainly in Wrocław on May 3 this year, when we proposed talks between the Government of the People’s Republic of Poland and the Holy See, in consultation with the Polish Episcopate. *Pro memoria* of October 1970 is only a continuation of this idea. Obviously, we don’t think that much can be done on this road. But the matter can be raised. The Secretariat of State could pose a few questions to the Government of the People’s Republic of Poland; for example, regarding the legal status of Church property in the Western Territories, or the status of religious buildings. We both doubt this will work. But an attempt can be made.¹⁰⁵

I suppose that for the primate, a significant impulse that caused the question of the Polish–Vatican talks to be resumed were the negotiations between Germany and the USSR and the People’s Republic of Poland in 1970. The primate saw the danger of

konkordat – trzeba naprzód zdać sobie sprawę jaką moc obowiązującą ma Konkordat z 1925 r., który jest jednostronnie wypowiedziany przez Rząd . . . Gwarancje – czy są możliwe? Właściwie żadne; . . . Komisja Wspólna [episkopatu i rządu – W.K.]? – tak! Przedstawiciel Stolicy Apostolskiej? – tak”!

¹⁰¹Theses for conversations with Comrade Werblan, March 23, 1967, Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej (AIPN), 0639/209, vol. 1/CD, sheet 102–103.

¹⁰²Kucharski, *Komuniści*, 337–338.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 343.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 350–369.

¹⁰⁵Stefan Wyszyński, “Pro memoria,” October 21, 1970, AAGn.: “Dawno już zarzucają nam, że stopujemy porozumienie Watykanu z Rządem PRL. Są to zarzuty, wysuwane rękami Paxu [katolicy współpracujący z komunistami – przyp. Autora]. Daliśmy odpowiedź, głównie we Wrocławiu dnia 3 maja br., proponując rozmowy Rządu PRL ze Stolicą Apostolską, w porozumieniu z Episkopatem Polski. Pro memoria z października 1970 r. jest tylko dalszym ciągiem tej myśli. Oczywiście, nie uważamy, by dało się na tej drodze wiele załatwić. Ale można sprawę postawić. Sekretariat Stanu mógłby postawić kilka pytań Rządowi PRL. Np.: dotyczących stanu prawnego własności kościelnej na Ziemiach Zachodnich, albo stanu budownictwa sakralnego. Obydwa wątplimy, czy to da wyniki. Ale próbę można podjąć.”

an agreement between Bonn and Moscow over Warsaw, analogous to the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact.¹⁰⁶ He expressed his point of view to the pope, Cardinal Döpfner, and employees of the Secretariat of State. Therefore, he expected a clear signal from the Holy See to support the Polish postulates regarding the church at the Western Territories. He summed up the barrenness of these talks with the question: “Do Poland’s matters in the Vatican always have to be viewed from the point of view of Germany?”¹⁰⁷ A perfect summary of the inertia of the Holy See’s actions is the comment that the primate noted after his meeting with Msgr Gabriel Montalvo:

I have laid out everything, to Msgr Casaroli, Card. Villot, Abp. Benelli and the Holy Father. I was kindly heard, assured of their feelings for Poland. *Niente piu! Speranza*—the most important word in diplomacy; and the secondmost *vuole pazienza*. I have had too much of this. I gave proof; I have been listening to the same words for 20 years. Msgr Montalvo is dismayed. I emphasize—I have theological faith, but I do not have faith in diplomats. I will come back empty-handed.¹⁰⁸

In December 1970, there was a change in the guard at the head of the leadership in Poland. After the brutal suppression of workers’ protests in Gdańsk, Gdynia, and Szczecin, Władysław Gomułka had to step down, and Edward Gierek assumed the position of First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party.¹⁰⁹ For the primate, this was a significant change. With no other First Secretary of the Communist Party in Poland did the Primate differ as much as with Gomułka.¹¹⁰ Gierek seemed to be a man much more open to dialogue. In the first months after the change of power, the primate was, as Rafał Łatka called it, “a moderate optimist.”¹¹¹ Following the change of power in Poland, the party leadership decided to return to negotiations with the Holy See.¹¹² An important factor was also the signing of the Treaty of Warsaw 1970 (treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and the People’s Republic of Poland); therefore, from the authorities’ perspective, the opening

¹⁰⁶Stefan Wyszyński, “Pro memoria,” October 17, 1970, AAGn.

¹⁰⁷Stefan Wyszyński, “Pro memoria,” October 21, 1970, AAGn.: “Czy istotnie sprawy Polski na Watykanie muszą być zawsze brane przez pryzmat Niemiec?”

¹⁰⁸Stefan Wyszyński, “Pro memoria,” October 27, 1970, AAGn.: “Wyłożyłem wszystko Mons. Casaroli, Kard. Villot, Arcbpowi Benelli i Ojcu Świętemu Zostałem uprzejmie wysłuchany - zapewniony o uczuciach dla Polski. Niente piu! - Speranza - słowo najważniejsze w dyplomacji - i drugie ci vuole pazienza. - Mam jej aż nadto wiele. Dałem dowód - 20 lat słucham tego samego. Mons. Montalvo jest skonsternowany. Podkreślam - mam wiarę teologiczną, ale nie mam wiary w dyplomatów. Wrócę z rękoma pustymi.”

¹⁰⁹Jerzy Eisler, *Grudzień 1970. Geneza, przebieg konsekwencje* (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2012). On the Primate’s reaction to the events of December 1970, see Paweł Skibiński, “Prymas Stefan Wyszyński a wydarzenia grudnia 1970 roku,” in *Stefan Wyszyński wobec oporu społecznego i opozycji 1945 – 1981*, ed. Ewa. K. Czaczkowska (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UKSW, 2018), 157–176; Jerzy Eisler, Jan Żaryn, “Grudzień 1970 w oczach Episkopatu Polski. Protokół z posiedzenia Rady Głównej Episkopatu, Warszawa, 29 grudnia 1970,” *Polska 1944/45–1989* 7 (2006), 307–357.

¹¹⁰Jerzy Eisler, “Stefan Wyszyński i Władysław Gomułka - dwie wizje Polski,” in *Pojednanie i polityka. Polsko-niemieckie inicjatywy pojednania w latach sześćdziesiątych XX wieku a polityka odprężenia*, ed. F. Boll et al. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2010), 129–151.

¹¹¹Rafał Łatka, “Prymas Wyszyński wobec pozornej normalizacji relacji państwo- Kościół pierwszych lat rządów Edwarda Gierka (1971–1974),” *Politeja*, no. 60 (2019): 349–371.

¹¹²Kucharski, *Komuniści*, 369–370.

of the road to recognition of the border by the international community, and from the church's perspective, the emergence of the possibility of the Pope establishing Polish dioceses in the western territories. From the authorities' point of view, the game was about the support of the Vatican, which could have an impact on the ratification of the treaty by the German side. On the other hand, from an internal perspective, the primate's position was expected to weaken.¹¹³ In the years 1971–1974, a series of Polish–Vatican talks was conducted, which led to the signing of an agreement establishing the Team for Permanent Working Contacts between the People's Republic of Poland and the Vatican.¹¹⁴ During this period, the primate had control over the course of the negotiation process to some extent. In fact, at every stage of the negotiations, a representative of the episcopate, usually Bishop Bronisław Dąbrowski, gave advice to the Vatican team and prepared the analytical documents necessary for the talks.¹¹⁵ The cardinal, however, was concerned about the outcome of the negotiations. He pointed out that Vatican diplomats should be made aware of the different understanding of the concept of “normalization” in the Holy See and in the People's Republic of Poland. He pointed out that for communists it meant submission to the instructions of state authority, while for the church it meant recognition for the character of one's own church.¹¹⁶ After the first round in the spring of 1971, the primate noted: “Casaroli is following the line of the program of talks prepared by the Polish Episcopate.”¹¹⁷ In spring, the Polish bishops prepared a list of demands that they proposed to put forward during talks with the Polish authorities. The list included a number of freedoms, such as teaching, religious building, organization of Church structures, and use of the media. The question of granting the church legal status was still the main postulate.¹¹⁸ It was a tactic based on a maximalist program.

It seems to me that a significant shift in the primate's thinking about Polish–Vatican negotiations took place in 1972 in connection with the ratification of the PRL–FRG treaty and the possibility of finally regulating the status of Polish dioceses in the former German territories incorporated into Poland after World War II. It was the primate who put pressure on the Secretariat of State to solve this problem before the next round of negotiations with the Polish government, without taking into account the possible demands of the authorities.¹¹⁹ On this occasion, the Polish government tried to prevent the creation of three new dioceses in northwest Poland and the appointment of bishops ordinary in them without the consent of the party authorities. After the proclamation of the apostolic constitution *Episcoporum Poloniae coetus*, which adjusted the administrative structures of the Church in Poland to the postwar borders, the primate no longer saw goals that were important for the church (especially in Poland) that Vatican diplomats would be able to achieve by negotiating with communist states. He was afraid that establishing relations would be realized at any cost, without taking into account, for example, violations of human rights in Poland.¹²⁰ He judged that Vatican diplomacy

¹¹³Ibid., 371–372.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 369–463.

¹¹⁵Ibid., 378.

¹¹⁶Peter Raina, *Kardynał Wyszyński. Czasy prymasowskie 1971* (Warszawa: von borowiecky, 2003), vol. 10, 72.

¹¹⁷Ibid., 74: “Casaroli idzie po linii programu rozmów, opracowanego przez Episkopat Polski.”

¹¹⁸Lettera del Card. Wyszyński a Mons. Casaroli con le suggestioni del Consiglio permanente dell'Episcopato polacco, April 12, 1972, in *La politica del dialogo*, 632–638.

¹¹⁹Kucharski, *Komuniści*, 416.

¹²⁰Ibid., 439.

was not sufficiently knowledgeable in Polish matters and that it could make compromises that would harm rather than help, as had been the case with Yugoslavia, in his opinion.¹²¹ According to the information collected by the embassy of the People's Republic of Poland in Rome during the talks at the Secretariat of State at the end of 1972, he was presumed to strongly oppose the establishment of a nunciature in Warsaw under the then-conditions, pointing out that it would be an expression of "the Vatican's distrust of him."¹²² It is, therefore, not surprising that, after the negotiations that took place in Warsaw in February 1974, the Permanent Council of the Episcopate was particularly concerned with the declaration of openness of the authorities and the Vatican to establishing permanent working contacts, without first settling problematic matters concerned with the functioning of the Church in Poland. The Primate wanted a representative of the episcopate in any potential Vatican team; additionally the bishops suggested that an action plan for this team should be prepared complementarily to the work of the mixed commission. It was considered crucial to define the purpose of the existence of such a team. It was assumed that it should be a systemic development of the target agreement, and not deal with current issues that should be dealt with by the mixed committee. Here the primate was afraid of the bypassing of the Polish episcopate in resolving conflict situations.¹²³ A sign that heralded such a danger was the steering of the talks by the Polish authorities in such a way that the partners for Vatican diplomacy were not diplomats, but employees of the Office for Religious Affairs. After the signing of the "protocol" between the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland and the Vatican on the establishment of the Team for Permanent Working Contacts (July 6, 1974), the primate complained in a letter to the Secretariat of State that the Polish bishops had not been properly informed about the activities undertaken by Vatican diplomats in Poland and their attitude toward Poland. Also, the preparation of the protocol itself had been carried out without taking into account the postulates of the Polish Episcopate; in addition, the procedure for summoning Bishop Dąbrowski for consultations before signing the protocol was inconsistent with the arrangements with the Secretariat of State.¹²⁴ The "protocol" established that the representative of the Polish authorities responsible for contacts with the Vatican would permanently reside in Rome, while, according to the arrangements with the primate, the representative of the Holy See would only, if necessary, come to Poland. According to Cardinal Wyszyński, the establishment of a permanent Vatican mission in Warsaw posed a risk of eliminating the episcopate from all talks with the authorities. At the same time, the primate warned that the government wanted to establish diplomatic relations without regulating important matters concerning the Church in Poland, and expected that the position of Vatican diplomacy in all internal matters would be consistent with the position of the episcopate (the Primate wrote about unity in the action of the Holy See and the episcopate).¹²⁵

¹²¹ Grajewski, *Kardynał*, 60.

¹²² Stanisław Kubat, Political Notes No. 10, December 7, 1972, AMSZ, Book of Acquisitions and Losses 45/77, Department IV, Italy, Secret 1972, sheet 8.

¹²³ Lettera del Card. Wyszyński a Mons. Casaroi con documentazione circa «l'istituzione dei contatti permanenti di lavoro», February 25, 1974, in *La politica del dialogo*, 665–668, 670–673.

¹²⁴ Promemoria del Card. Wyszyński alla Segreteria di Stato, November 4, 1974, in *La politica del dialogo*, 692–693.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 696.

VI. Cardinal Wyszyński on the Functioning of the Teams for Permanent Working Contacts, 1974–1981

The visit to Rome of Plenipotentiary Minister Kazimierz Szablewski, who headed the Polish team for permanent working contacts with the Vatican, had a significant consequence for the primate. As this representative became the competent unit for diplomatic relations with the Catholic Church, all duties and activities concerning the Holy See, including contacts with Polish bishops resident in Rome, were transferred to him. This is clearly visible in the decreased interest of the officials from the embassy of the Polish People's Republic in Rome in the activities of the primate.¹²⁶ Moreover, the institutionalization of contacts had an effect that the primate feared; namely, the authorities in Warsaw established a channel of communication with the headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church, independent of the Polish episcopate. The authorities, therefore, could nudge the Holy See with proposals and solutions to internal conflicts related to the relations between the state and the church without the mediation of the primate and the Polish bishops. A good example of this was the attempt to push their own (state) candidates to take over the Wrocław diocese after the death of Cardinal Bolesław Kominek.¹²⁷ The authorities, in direct relations with the Secretariat of State, pushed the candidacies of Bishop Wincenty Urban; Fr. Prof. Mieczysław Albert Krąpiec OP, the rector of the Catholic University of Lublin; or Fr. Prof. Jan Stępień, the rector of the Academy of Catholic Theology in Warsaw. It should also be added that from the authorities' point of view, the dispute was not only about the names, but also about the competence to nominate bishops. Until now, the primate, after agreement with the authorities, presented candidates to the pope. Now the authorities could directly inform the Secretariat of State of the Holy See that a given candidate was unsuitable and another would be approved by the government. Fortunately, the Holy See fully supported the competences of the primate in this matter. Finally, after two years, the candidate presented by Primate Wyszyński was selected.¹²⁸

Also, the appointment of Archbishop Luigi Poggi to represent the Vatican in the team for permanent working contacts heightened Cardinal Wyszyński's fears that the Polish bishops would lose their influence on the situation of the Church in Poland. It soon turned out that the Vatican diplomats, contrary to earlier arrangements, were aiming to establish a permanent representative in Poland. The primate indicated that this posed a risk of establishing the Secretariat of State as an intermediary, and I would add a neutral and, according to the primate, uninformed actor in relations between the church and the state.¹²⁹ This led to a dispute lasting several years between the primate (Polish episcopate) and the Secretariat of State over the competences of Vatican diplomats in Poland. This ended only with the election of Karol Wojtyła as pope. At the end of his pontificate, Paul VI himself pressed the primate to accepted the establishment a permanent representation of the Vatican in Warsaw. During the meeting with the secretary of the Polish episcopate, Bishop Dąbrowski, the pope was said to have argued that "a local Church, in which there is no delegate of the Holy Father, is incomplete."¹³⁰ Poland would be the second communist country in

¹²⁶Kucharski, "Polish–Vatican Talks"; Łatka, "Prymas Stefan Wyszyński wobec gry."

¹²⁷Rafał Łatka, "Sprawa wrocławska, czyli spór Kościoła z państwem o następcę kard. Bolesława Kominka (1974–1976)," in *Kardynał Bolesław Kominek*, 349–389.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, 376–384.

¹²⁹Rafał Łatka, *Episkopat Polski wobec stosunków państwo-Kościół i rzeczywistości społeczno-politycznej PRL 1970–1989* (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2019), 216–254.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, 228.

Europe, after Yugoslavia, where a Vatican diplomat would reside.¹³¹ Some researchers even suggest that the Secretary of State, Card. Jean-Marie Villot, tried to force Primate Wyszyński to accept Archbishop Poggi as a *quasi nuncio* in Poland after the death of Paul VI, referring to the will of the deceased pope.¹³² Undoubtedly, the attitude of the primate toward the effects of Polish–Vatican relations became more critical during this period. This was also connected with a rather harsh assessment of the balance of the Vatican’s eastern policy during the pontificate of Paul VI. After meeting with the pope on November 11, 1977, Cardinal Wyszyński expressed his opinion in the following words:

The Holy See has established bishops in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. But these bishops have no power, they are fully dependent on the powers of the state administration. We don’t want such situations. Cardinal Lékai was so fearful that at the Synod, with 200 members, he distorted the picture of the Church’s situation. A bishop must be brave. The Bishop from Slovakia did not lack this courage. It is painful for us. It is important that there are bishops, but it is not unimportant whether they are brave believers and defenders of the Faith. The Holy Father listened carefully to this and said nothing. I would like to add that we have very detailed information on the situation in Hungary, as pilgrims come to Jasna Góra and our tourists go to Hungary. They hear from priests and the faithful that “it was better before than today.”¹³³

It should be noted that until 1978, the activities of Vatican diplomacy did not bring about any significant changes in Poland, but a significant effect was the increased tension in the relations between the episcopate and the Secretariat of State. With regard to the diplomatic mission of the Holy See, the pressures of the Secretariat of State and the pope himself began to produce effects at the end of 1977. Despite his reservations, the primate was inclined to recognize the necessity of the permanent residence of an apostolic delegate in Poland, but he wanted to define his competences precisely in writing.¹³⁴

The election of Karol Wojtyła as pope changed everything. The communist authorities in Poland lost any possibility of influencing the affairs of the Church in Poland via the Vatican, bypassing Primate Wyszyński and the bishops. (This does not mean that the Polish authorities had such an opportunity during the pontificate of Paul VI, but they tried to obtain it and hoped that it was achievable.) The Holy See, on the other hand, implemented a major revision of the assumptions of the Vatican’s eastern

¹³¹Jure Ramšaš, “The Crumbling Touchstone of the Vatican’s Ostpolitik: Relations between the Holy See and Yugoslavia, 1970–1989,” *The International History Review* 43, no. 4 (2021): 852–869.

¹³²Łatka, *Episkopat*, 249–251.

¹³³Stefan Wyszyński, *Pro memoria* 1977, November 11, 1977, AAGn.: “Stolica Apostolska ustanowiła Biskupów na Węgrzech i w Czechosłowacji. Ale ci biskupi nie mają żadnej władzy, pozostają w pełnej zależności od władz administracji państwowej. Nie chcemy takich sytuacji. Kardynał Lékai okazał tak wielką bojaźliwość, że na Synodzie, wobec 200 członków, zniekształcił obraz sytuacji Kościoła. Biskup musi być odważny. Nie zabrakło tej odwagi Biskupowi ze Słowacji. Jest to dla nas bolesne. Ważną jest rzeczą, aby byli Biskupi, ale nie jest obojętne, czy oni są odważnymi wyznawcami i obrońcami Wiary. Ojciec św. uważnie tego słuchał i nic nie odpowiedział. Dodaję, że mamy bardzo dokładne informacje, jak sprawa wygląda na Węgrzech, gdyż przybywają pielgrzymi na Jasną Górę, a na Węgry jeżdżą nasi turyści. Słyszą oni od księży i wiernych, że «lepiej było poprzednio, niż dziś».”

¹³⁴Łatka, *Episkopat*, 240–248.

policy.¹³⁵ John Paul II ensured not only security for the activities of the primate and episcopate in Poland, but he made all potential risks resulting from the political and diplomatic activities of the Holy See disappear. The new situation fundamentally changed the primate's approach to Polish–Vatican relations. It can even be said that yesterday's threats had become today's opportunities. While, during the pontificate of Paul VI, the primate had defended himself by all available means against a permanent Vatican mission in Warsaw, during the pontificate of John Paul II, he could accept its creation. According to Kazimierz Szablewski, who referred to a conversation with Bishop Dąbrowski, John Paul II is said to have expressed as early as November 1980 the desire to raise the rank of Polish–Vatican contacts to the level of embassy-nunciature, a decision which the primate would not oppose.¹³⁶

VII. Conclusion

The primate's attitude to the issue of Polish–Vatican relations changed over time. It should be noted that the primate was at least four times directly involved in talks on the arrangement of Polish–Vatican relations: in 1951, 1957, 1963, and 1965. He supported the Polish authorities in establishing contact with the Holy See or provided the pope with proposals for talks. In the initial period, the primate thought about Polish–Vatican relations in the context of the concordat regime of 1925. I suppose that he foresaw the reinstatement of the concordat or the signing of a new agreement of this type, which would guarantee appropriate rights to the Roman Catholic Church in Poland. This way of thinking was also close to Pius XII, who based the building of the Holy See's relations with states and, in general, the activity of papal diplomacy on concordat agreements.¹³⁷ With time, however, the primate gained more and more distance from the purposefulness and effectiveness of the functioning of relations between the Holy See and communist states. It seems that from the mid-1960s, the actions of the Holy See and the implementation of the Vatican's so-called *Ostpolitik* had a greater impact on the primate's view of Polish–Vatican relations than did the religious and foreign policy of the Polish authorities. The Church in Poland functioned fairly steadily, and the episcopate enjoyed considerable independence. In addition to the still strongly repressive state policy and extensive surveillance, there are clear differences in the functioning of the Catholic Church in Poland and in other countries from the Soviet sphere of influence. On the other hand, the primate assessed the effects of Vatican policy in other communist countries extremely critically.¹³⁸ According to him, local churches lost more than they gained from the Vatican's agreements with communist governments.

¹³⁵George Weigel, *Witness to Hope. The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Cliff Street Books, 1999). For the most recent item on this topic, see Irena Mikłaszewicz and Andrzej Grajewski, eds., *Pontyfikat wielu zagrożeń. Jan Paweł II w świetle dokumentów sprawy „Kapella” 1979–1990* (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2021). This includes a more detailed list of references.

¹³⁶Cryptogram 1598/IV sent from Rome November 4, 1980, by Kazimierz Szablewski to Józef Czyrek. AMSZ, ZD 29/81, l. 16, vol. 135, sheet 451. This information is not confirmed in the Primate's records, that is, *Pro memoria*. However, this does not mean it is untrue.

¹³⁷Chamedes, *A Twentieth-Century Crusade*, 248–265.

¹³⁸It is worth comparing Primate Wyszynski's view of Vatican *Ostpolitik* with the views of another bishop from behind the Iron Curtain, namely Pavol Hnilica of Slovakia. See Emilia Hrabovec, “Bischof Pavol Hnilica SJ und der Heilige Stuhl, Slovak Studies,” *Rivista dell'Istituto storico slovacco di Roma* 5, nos. 1–2 (2019): 43–72.

Additionally, it should be noted that the perceptions of the Polish authorities and the primate concerning the Polish–Vatican negotiations were radically different. Needless to say, the party and the church in Poland had different goals, although both the authorities and the bishops hoped for acceptance of the Polish–German border by the Holy See. Another issue is the assumptions made by the Secretariat of State before and during these negotiations. We do not have access to Vatican documentation from that period; however, even on the basis of Polish materials (party and church), it can be concluded that in many aspects the assumptions of Vatican diplomats’ negotiation strategies did not match with the primate’s suggestions and ideas.

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Cite this article: Kucharski, Wojciech. “Diplomatic Relations between Poland and the Holy See and the Vatican’s *Ostpolitik* from the Perspective of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Primate of Poland 1948–1981.” *Church History* 92, no. 4 (December 2023): 886–910. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640723002767>.