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Programmatic Conceptions of the Polish Christian Democracy

(1989-1991)

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Preliminary remarks

The Christian Democratic movement invokes the principles of the social teachings of the Church. The problems of community, solidarity, subsidiarity and respect for private property are emphasised. During the transformations set off in 1989 the Christian Democratic movement turned out to be internally differentiated both in terms of its programme and its organisation¹. Groups of centrist, right-of-centre and left-of-centre orientation can be distinguished.

In this respect, what is important is the reconstruction of the general vision of the world presented by this political movement. It includes the main ideas and social conceptions of the particular currents of the Christian Democratic movement,

particular attitudes regarding the role of religion, Churches, social, political and economic questions in a modern democratic state. The Christian Democratic movement appears on the political arena first of all as political parties, both reactivated and new ones, invoking in their declared postulates the assumptions of the social teachings of the Church.

Programmatic conceptions of the Christian Democratic Labour Party

One of the first groups reactivated was Labour Party. Thus, in February 1989, the Christian Democratic Labour Party was formed, headed by a lawyer, and opposition activist, Władysław Siła-Nowicki. The activity of the Party was to rest on the principles of Christian morality and the assumptions of the social teachings of the Catholic Church, primarily the precepts of John Paul II.

The Party aimed at becoming a people's party, open to representatives of different social groups, who accept Christian and democratic values². Among the values proclaimed were: democracy and tolerance, freedom and respect for the individual, national community, and social solidarity. A fully tolerant, and not a theocratic, state should take into account the historic, as well as current, role of the Catholic Church in Poland. Important social decisions should be consulted with the Church. The Party was in favour of various ways of self-government. It supported a social market economy³.

Programmatic conceptions of the Christian Democratic Party 'Zjednoczenie'

In October 1990 some activists of the Labour Party founded the Christian Democratic Party “Zjednoczenie” [“Unification”], while others joined the initiatives of the Centre Agreement and the Christian Labour Party. The Christian Democratic Party “Zjednoczenie” adopted the assumption that Christian Democratic organisations were to be a form of political and civic activity of Catholic, and more broadly Christian and lay, environments. Thus it was not to be an organisation acting on a Church's mandate. In this connection, the Christian Democratic movement should draw doctrinal inspiration from the teachings of the Church and respect the attitudes of the hierarchy, but act on its own responsibility in the form of political parties⁴.

Jan Zabłocki, in one of his contributions, said: “[...] When we talk about liberalism, we reject it together with the Church's Magisterium not only because individual liberals speak against the Church, but primarily because the liberal vision of the economy is different from its vision according to the Catholic social teaching. It is a vision of the economy as a completely autonomous sphere, not subjected to ethical norms or to Christian law and values”⁵.

Programmatic conceptions of the Christian Labour Party

In March 1990 the Christian Labour Party came into being. The idea of the group was born at a congress of the Union of Polish Handicraft on the initiative of the artisan environment, dissatisfied with the functioning of the Union. The group was to unite artisans, entrepreneurs, merchants and representatives of free professions. The aim of the group's activity focused on the restoration of the Polish middle class⁶.

The ideological declaration pointed out that “Poland's greatest asset is creative work. The Polish work ethos is inseparably linked with the Christian origins of our

country, with the general approbation of Christian principles in social and personal life”⁷. With regard to economy, the principles of etatism and liberalism were rejected, and the solutions of social market economy were chosen. The basis of the economic order was to be private property, competition, the market and the freedom of consumers and entrepreneurs. In social matters the principle of the state's interventionism in the social sphere was stressed, as well as the decentralisation of social policy, fighting unemployment and the introduction of a new social insurance system.

Programmatic conceptions of the Party of Christian Democrats

The Party of Christian Democrats, established at the founding conference in December 1990, invoked in its activity Christian values and the social teachings of the Catholic Church⁸. It was stressed that the group does not aim at becoming a religious party and creating a religious state.

The vision of social order was to rest on the principles of subsidiarity and social solidarism⁹. The need for a greater role of self-government in all spheres of life was declared. On the economic level the role of market economy was underlined, which was significantly to improve the citizens' standard of living and strengthen the institution of the state. The need was stressed for the state's active role in creating the principles of economic policy in the transitional period. An important function was to be fulfilled by a proper social policy guaranteeing the protection of the Polish family.

Programmatic conceptions of the Centre Agreement

An attempt to create a modern Christian Democratic party in Poland was taken up by the Centre Agreement, formed in May 1990. A vision of a strong people's party was launched, meeting the expectations of a considerable section of the society which does not identify itself with any social class, at the same time declaring itself on the side of Christian values and a common national tradition.

The group stayed open to cooperation with liberal movements (if they acknowledged the role of the Church in the Polish tradition and culture and remained open-minded in economic issues)¹⁰. Cooperation with other groups of the Christian Democratic mainstream was declared, including that of Aleksander Hall's, the Christian People's Party and the Christian Democratic Union (which, however, according to J. Kaczyński, departed in its assumptions from a vision of Christian Democracy, mostly because of the references in its declarations to a pre-Council vision of the world in the teachings of the Church)¹¹.

On the economic front the Agreement chose the solutions of social market economy. Market forces were to be tied to the principles of social policy. In one of his speeches chairman Jarosław Kaczyński introduced a vision of a future social order: “We openly declare that, although we are a Christian Democracy and wish to conduct a Christian Democratic policy, should we succeed in winning power, in no way would we want to build a Christian Democratic state, to create structures which would make certain elements of the Christian Democratic programme an irrevocable element [...]. We want to leave space here for social choice. We simply regard it as a condition of democracy”¹².

Programmatic conceptions of the Polish Christian Democratic Forum

In the new circumstances the associations of lay Catholics, active during the period of “real socialism” (PAX and UchS) stood on their own feet again. In February 1991, on the initiative of PAX activists, the Polish Christian Democratic Forum was founded. It declared itself in favour of an open Christian Democratic formula gradually tending towards the form of a union, including primarily an electoral union.

The Forum was to remain a lay group, but one closely connected with the Church and the moral-religious values propagated by it. It was said that the programme of Christian Democratic groups must remain linked with the Polish national tradition. In the programmatic Principles prepared for the session continuing the Polish Christian Democratic Forum one can read: “The ideological roots of our party refer both to the world heritage of Christian-Democracy and to the Polish - practical and theoretical - achievements of Christian, democratic and patriotic movements. We attach particular importance to the historic legacy of the union of the Polish tradition and identity with the Christian ethos, to the community of the history of the nation and the Catholic Church in Poland”¹³.

The programme should therefore take into account the traditions of national culture understood as a collection of ethical contents of a Christian character, simultaneously rejecting the cosmopolitan and liberal currents of contemporary Western culture¹⁴. The sphere of public life should be subject to Christian values. In one of his addresses, Maciej Wrzeszcz stressed: “In Poland we want to build a democracy, but let us first answer the question whether it is to be a democracy in which every value and antivalue are equivalent, or a democracy which is based on a certain skeleton, certain hierarchy of Christian values”¹⁵.

A model of social and state life was to rest, according to the PChDF, on Christian values. The idea of human dignity was emphasised. The goals of political

action and the ways of their realisation were to be subject to ethical norms. The constitutional-legal system was to stem from the expression of the indispensable rights of a human person (primarily from every human's right to the protection of life from conception to natural death). Particular attention was to be paid to the family as a fundamental community, a cradle of upbringing for social and civic life. The moral and material importance of human work was also deemed a necessary factor of social order. An important element of democracy was to be local self-government. Reform aiming at the subjectivisation of self-government and a limitation of the omnipotence of the communist state was seen as compatible with the principle of subsidiarity and the Polish traditions of self-government. In the economic sphere the group was in favour of the solutions of market social economy. Its basis was to be private property, seen as a natural right of man and an element forming his freedom.

At the 1st Congress of the Polish Christian Democratic Forum, held on 5th October 1991, reference was made to the contemporary socio-political situation: “As Christian-Democrats we must take a decisive, ideologically and programmatically motivated oppositional stance towards the current policy of a government of liberals. We are not responsible for this policy since we do not participate in the executive power in any degree, although neither do we take advantage of the weakening of the government's power in order to join the recent attempts to overthrow it even before the elections [...] The Polish society [...] on the whole does not wish either for the return of some form of neocommunism or the continuation of liberal experiments leading to the 'latinisation' of Poland. And therein lies a chance for the programmatic propositions of Christian Democracy”¹⁶.

Final remarks

A challenge facing the Christian Democratic movement was the problem of forming a federation joining the various political groups describing themselves as Christian Democratic. On the whole, the movement was treated as potentially one of the main forces on the Polish political scene; a movement directed by the values of the Catholic social teachings. In this respect it was seen as an alternative to a liberal vision of the world, which a part of the society found disappointing. The Catholic social teachings, referring to the principles of subsidiarity and social justice, would be a suitable challenge for liberal solutions or nationalist conceptions. In this situation, the Catholic social teachings would form an axiological basis for a restructuring society.

The programmatic diversification invites to draw a few final conclusions. First, the Christian Democratic movement tried to use the chance created by the 1989 transformations and to arise on the political scene of a free democratic country. Second, the lack of one significant Christian Democratic party testifies to the weakness of the groups invoking the canon of values regarded as characteristic of Christian Democracy. Third, a decisive majority of political groups appeals in their political programmes to the principles of the social teachings of the Church and, more broadly, to Christian values.

¹ Maria Marczevska-Rytko, "Ruch chrześcijańsko-demokratyczny w procesie przemian w Polsce" [The Christian Democratic Movement in the Process of Transformations in Poland], in: *Religia chrześcijańska a idee polityczne* [The Christian Religion and Political Ideas], ed. Bogumił Grott, Kraków 1998, pp. 145-160.

² Henryk Przybylski, „Stronnictwo Pracy” [‘Labour Party’], in: *Doktryny polityczne w Polsce 1989-1991* [Political Doctrines in Poland 1989-1991], ed. Henryk Przybylski, Katowice 1992, p. 71.

³ „Polska panorama polityczna. Lewica, prawica i centrum - 13 pytań o program” [Polish Political Panorama. Left, Right and Centre - 13 Questions about the Programme], *Polityka* 1990, No. 31 (4 Aug), p. 4.

⁴ “Conversation with Janusz Zabłocki, Chairman of the Christian Democratic Party 'Zjednoczenie' [‘Unification’]”, held by Z. Lesiewski, *Integracja* 1991, No. 1, p. 11.

⁵ “J. Zabłocki's contribution”, *Integracja* 1991, No. 2, pp. 17-18.

⁶ “Conversation with J. Hermanowicz, Chairman of the National Council of the Christian Labour Party, held by Z. Lesiewski”, *Integracja* 1991, No.1, p. 12.

⁷ Henryk Przybylski, Helena Przybyła, *Katolicka nauka społeczna a ruch chrześcijańsko-demokratyczny* [Catholic Social Teachings and the Christian Democratic Movement], Katowice 1996, p. 51.

⁸ “Conversation with senator K. Pawłowski, Chairman of the Board of the Party of Christian Democrats”, *Integracja* 1991, No. 1, p. 9; “Conversation with P. Strączkowski”, *Słowo*, 28 February 1991.

⁹ „Programmatic declaration”, *Merkuriusz partii i ugrupowań politycznych* 1993, No. 4, pp. 1-11.

¹⁰ “Conversation with senator J. Kaczyński, Chairman of the Centre Agreement, held by A. Cymer”, *Integracja* 1991, No. 1, pp. 6-7.

¹¹ J. Kaczyński, *Chrześcijańska Demokracja w Polsce dzisiaj* [Christian Democracy in Poland Today], Warszawa 1992, p. 13.

¹² „J. Kaczyński's statement”, *Integracja* 1991, No. 2, p. 15. Cf also: „Polska mapa polityczna. Lewica, prawica i centrum” [Polish Political Map. Left, right and centre], *Polityka* 1990, No. 30 (28 July), p. 3.

¹³ “Polish Christian Democratic Forum. Programmatic Principles”, *Integracja* 1991, No. 1, pp. 28-30.

¹⁴ Maciej Wrzeszcz wrote: “Under the influence of an ethical crisis which has deeply affected Western democracies, we observe in Poland as well a penetration of various constitutional-legal spheres and of the organisations of Polish public life by the spirit of egoist laicism, ethical indifferentism, ultimate liberalism and hedonism. Environments treating seriously the functioning of Christian and national values in the public life of an emerging new Poland are thus in [...] for a long and difficult struggle against such tendencies. This struggle is only beginning and the existing Catholic formation in Poland is not appropriately prepared for it, and many people are even prepared to treat liberal-lay solutions as progressive”. Maciej Wrzeszcz, *W kierunku polskiej Chrześcijańskiej Demokracji* [Towards a Polish Christian Democracy], Biblioteka *Integracji* (no date or place of issue), p. 70.

¹⁵ „M. Wrzeszcz's statement”, *Integracja* 1991, No. 2, p. 16.

¹⁶ “Second tour of the PChDF Congress”, *Integracja* 1991, No. 7, p. 6.