

# The Transformation of *Tygodnik Powszechny*

**Roman Graczyk**

When in March 1945 Kraków Archbishop Adam Stefan Sapieha lay the groundwork for a new periodical titled *Tygodnik Powszechny* (Universal Weekly), the war front had not yet reached the Oder River. The war was still going on, but it was already possible to speak in full voice of the catastrophe that Adolf Hitler's experiment had brought to Central Europe—and, between the lines, how catastrophic was the ongoing experiment of Josef Stalin. The word “catastrophe” seems to accurately reflect the state of mind of the thinking people at that time: only those who did little thinking could have assumed that one could shake off dirt and dust and go on as if nothing unusual had happened. After Katyń, Auschwitz, and the razing of Warsaw the old world was thoroughly in ruin not only physically but also, and primarily, spiritually.

*Tygodnik Powszechny's* founding fathers were aware of this situation. They realized that the new Poland could not be a copy of the country that existed before September 1939—not only because the Soviet-supported communists were in power but also because the world needed a new and stronger foundation, one that would not crumble before adversity as the old one had done. The founding fathers believed that Catholicism was the proper foundation for this new Poland. In the first issue Rev. Jan Piwowarczyk wrote: “Our attitude toward what is happening can be expressed in two statements. First, the world, and Poland in it, not only have to be rebuilt, but also restructured. And second, the Catholic Church has to play a particularly important role in this restructuring. . . . Our task consists in . . . creating a new type of culture that would accommodate such Western values as the primacy of spirit over the material world, liberation of the human person from the tyranny of conditions into which he/she was born, ethical meaning of life. . . . The archives of history will

absorb what already happened and belongs to the past. The new epoch will reabsorb the values that are permanent; among them, Catholicism.”

While *Tygodnik's* editor Jerzy Turowicz differed considerably from Father Piwowarczyk, he too subscribed to the program described above. He wrote: “As we scrutinize the roots of the contemporary European crisis, we discover that its deepest and most substantial cause was the abandonment of Christianity. . . . This abandonment also meant the abandonment of truth, and it was bound to lead to European disintegration and disunity. In the last decades before the war there were attempts to prevent the catastrophe by placing at the center of Europe's spiritual identity new and secular truths. But Truth cannot be replaced. It can grow and develop and its understanding can deepen, but it cannot be made subject to social engineering. New truths usually have little to do with Truth. The ruins of Europe now testify to the fact that the attempts to engineer new truths failed miserably.” Both Turowicz and Piwowarczyk agreed that theirs was a Catholic vision of the world, man, nation, and history; and that without such vision the task that they had undertaken would be pointless. This is why *Tygodnik's* subtitle, prominently displayed in the first and subsequent issues read “A Catholic social and cultural periodical.”

Until the first major confrontation with the communist authorities in 1948/49, the publication profile was mainly influenced by the Rev. Piwowarczyk and his close collaborator Józef Maria Święcicki. In early 1947 Święcicki wrote that “the Church is the trustee of Truth . . . and it cannot agree to place Error on the same level as Truth. Thus the tolerance that the Church advocates and supports is different from the tolerance advanced by secularists. The Church has in mind the tolerance of persons and does not condone violating someone's conscience but at the same time, it does not condone unlimited freedom of utterance and speculation, or propaganda of destructive doctrines that poison human conscience. Its task is to defend its members from infiltration of evil; it therefore hopes and expects that the state will approve the Church's work in defending the souls of citizens from ignominious ideas.”

It is generally known that in subsequent years *Tygodnik* abandoned this exclusively Catholic understanding of truth. Beginning in 1949, Rev. Piwowarczyk and Józef Maria Święcicki began to play second fiddle in editorial decisions and were replaced by those professing Vatican II views *avant la lettre*. After Vatican II (1962–1965) these ideas entered the mainstream of Catholic thought. But let us leave aside this shift in the views of *Tygodnik* editors. What I want to emphasize is that both groups of thinkers treated Catholicism very seriously, not only the Rev. Piwowarczyk and his supporters, but also Turowicz and Stanisław Stomma with theirs: Antoni Gołubiew, Jerzy Zawieyski, Paweł Jasienica, Rev. Andrzej Bardecki; the somewhat younger generation of Jacek Woźniakowski, Tadeusz Żychiewicz, and Józefa Hennelowa; and the group that joined the *Tygodnik* team after October 1956: Stefan Wilkanowicz, Mieczysław Pszon, Krzysztof Kozłowski, Bronisław Mamoń, Jerzy Kołataj, Marek Skwarnicki, Jacek Susuł, Rev. Mieczysław Maliński, and many others. All of them were of the opinion that their Catholic *credo* was the key element of their engagement in public life.

Even though after 1956 the *Tygodnik* editors made the momentous decision to enter real politics, the Catholic foundation of the weekly remained strong. However, attentive observers could see a subtle shift. *Tygodnik* writers began to opine on political issues not “as Catholics,” but rather as those who took into consideration the point of view of “being Catholic.” The difference consisted in not claiming that they represented the views of all Catholics or of the Church—hence, among others, their opposition to the formation of a Catholic party. In spite of this shift, *Tygodnik’s* Catholic component remained strong. Its editors wrote and served as MPs or council members because being Catholic involved an obligation to get involved. However, unlike their late 1940s predecessor Józef Maria Święcicki, they did not proclaim the necessity of acknowledging one Truth. They still believed that Truth exists and that the shortest way to reach it was through the Catholic Church, but they did not preach it.

A good many members of the editorial board were enthusiastic about Vatican II. This group

included Turowicz, Rev. Bardecki, Józefa Hennelowa, Stefan Wilkanowicz, and Rev. Maliński. Some, including Turowicz, practiced what came to be called the ideas of Vatican II long before they were proclaimed: Turowicz did it in the prewar *Odrodzenie* and Mrs. Hennelowa in the Benedictine-sponsored youth movement in Wilno/Vilnius. Their pro-Vatican II attitude was sincere and spontaneous, but it sometimes led to conflicts with other currents in the Polish Church, including the one headed by Primate Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński. Their understanding of the Church was somewhat different from that of Cardinal Wyszyński, but both they and he kept the Church at the center of their activity. The Church was their home, and they wanted to increase the spirit of community and respect for individuals in this home; they felt that these two issues were not given enough attention in pre-Vatican II times. Although they and Cardinal Wyszyński offered good arguments in support of their views, this article is not the place to expand on these arguments. The new *Tygodnik* people may not have been loved by the Primate, but love of the Church was still their primary motive.

#### DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

At the turn of 1975/76 *Tygodnik* joined those who said “no” to the process of the further sovietization of Poland. This was to occur by changing several articles of the Constitution. The opposition to constitutional change was split between Catholics and so-called revisionists. Among the latter the most prominent were the *commandos* of 1968 who in September 1976 founded the Committee for the Defense of Workers (KOR, later KSS KOR). Catholics were represented by the Clubs of the Catholic Intelligentsia in Warsaw, Kraków, Wrocław, and Toruń; the Poznań CCI did not participate. Even though communist authorities forced acceptance of two constitutional amendments, the joint KOR-KKI action paid off by consolidating opposition forces. The CCI Catholics paid a price: from that point on, they were not allowed to be candidates in parliamentary elections. Owing to the fact that at this point communism in Poland was in rapid decline, the price of not being allowed to run for parliament was not excessive. In fact, it soon became obvious that

CCI people, including the *Tygodnik Powszechny* team, were playing a more prominent role in society than when they were officially allowed to participate in the Sejm. John Paul II was elected Pope, there came Solidarność, and the communist system was visibly crumbling. The names of Turowicz, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Andrzej Wielowieyski, Pszon, and Kozłowski gained weight in circles of the “alternative” (i.e., noncommunist) Polish elite.

Long before Vatican II, members of the *Tygodnik* team, with the exception of Father Piwowarczyk and his friends, proclaimed that Catholic rights should flow from citizens’ rights and that a situation should not arise in which Catholics were granted certain rights on an exceptional basis. This open and ecumenical attitude provided an acceptable foundation for collaboration with the non-Catholic part of the opposition to Soviet-style communism. As early as the 1940s people like Stomma, Turowicz, Zawieyski, Stefan Kisielewski and their younger colleagues from CCI held such views. It is thanks to the support from the *Tygodnik* group that Adam Michnik’s book *The Church and the Left (Kościół-Lewica-Dialog)* gained so much traction; it was because it found collaborative partners on the Church’s side. Thus the collaboration between revisionists and Catholics was forged and was gaining traction. The question is, how has this close relation influenced the identity of both partners?

It is obvious today that the contemporary Polish institutions and media outlets whose roots are in the secular Left have not changed their foundational premises even the slightest bit since their inception. Such media outlets as *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Radio TOK FM, and the Batory Foundation have their ideological protoplasts in the March ’68 revisionists and in the KOR (Committee for the Defense of Workers). Their rhetoric has changed because the world has changed and priorities had to be rearranged, but the inspiration and goals have remained the same. Can one detect a similar permanence in *Tygodnik Powszechny*? I do not even have in mind the foundational years when the pre-Vatican II point of view of Piwowarczyk and Święcicki held sway, but the *Tygodnik* of Jerzy Turowicz and Stanislaw Stomma that

emerged around 1949. In my opinion, the difference between then and now should not be described by such words as “change of means” or “change of rhetoric.” The proper word is “breakaway.” The process of separating *TP* from its roots has been gradual and subdued, yet very real.

In the early 1980s when I began to work for *Tygodnik Powszechny*, it was taken for granted that we all participated in Easter missions, penitentiary reflection being part of them. These customs went hand in hand with what *Tygodnik* was printing for its readers. Although *TP* was not a devotional publication, it did describe the world from a Catholic perspective, or at least based itself on a Catholic inspiration. After all, collective participation in Eastern missions was not practiced by any other popular periodical. Of course it was not a matter of ordering anyone to attend; however, the fact that Jerzy Turowicz was always present at Sunday Mass at St. Ann’s and that he almost always took Holy Communion meant a great deal. Others followed, not because they were afraid that their boss would look at them askance, but because they viewed themselves as members of a community of journalists who wrote for a Catholic periodical. This is how it was. Today this picture recalls a world that no longer exists.

Toward the end of the 1980s one of our colleagues, my contemporary, left his wife and began to cohabit with another woman. He automatically declared his readiness to resign his position on the editorial board without anyone urging him to stay. All of us understood that it would be inappropriate for him to remain. Ten years later a similar situation occurred, but its protagonist did not leave. It was clear that the spirit of the community of the allegedly Catholic journalists had changed. Still later Jerzy Pilch, a notable writer who replaced Stefan Kisielewski as columnist [Kisielewski died in 1991, *ed.*], decided to also write for the porn magazine *Hustler*. He was ready to leave *TP*, but his editorial colleagues asked him to change his mind (I do not quite remember—he may have already left and his colleagues asked him to return). Among those who asked him to stay was Józefa Hennenlowa, otherwise known as a person of conservative views.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century Janusz Poniewierski left the editorial board. He was one of those who took *TP*'s Catholicism seriously. Others also resigned: Tomasz Ponikło, Maciej Müller, deputy editor Dariusz Jaworski who was widely regarded as a possible replacement for Rev. Adam Boniecki, the editor-in-chief. None of them fit the periodical's new profile. What had changed? Let me provide an example. One day members of the editorial board discussed two possible topics for a forthcoming issue. Should it be the march of the atheists then taking place, or a miracle in the Sokółka parish where the Holy Communion wafer allegedly changed into a substance resembling pieces of a real human heart in distress? The atheist march won.

#### THE SYNOD OF HOPE FOR THE DIVORCED

I think it is not by accident that many of the clergy who wrote for this new *Tygodnik Powszechny* that advocated change and "modernization" of the Church eventually left the priesthood. Such was the case with Stanisław Obirek SJ, Tadeusz Bartoś OP, and Tadeusz Gadacz SP (Tomasz Węclawski's case was different, in my opinion). Since these are but a few examples of what massively happened, perhaps one can deduce from this repeated process the course of destruction of the Catholic Church principles that first attracted such people to *Tygodnik Powszechny* and then pushed them onto the road of abandonment of their priestly vocation.

In 2014 and 2015 in particular, during the Synod of bishops dedicated to the problems of Catholic families the Kraków periodical did not fail to take a stance. I would even venture to say that this stance became its dominating feature. Let us look at the texts about the Synod. Not one of them expresses a traditional Catholic point of view. This point of view is mentioned, but only as an adversary with whom one should conduct a war of words. Virtually all texts published in *TP* concerning the Synod stand in opposition to the Synod's tenets, overtly or covertly.

Shortly before the Synod began, Artur Sporniak wrote: "In the future, marriage will have to become extraordinarily strong psychologically and spiritually, which will make it a rare

occurrence. Does the Church really intend to limit the distribution of Holy Communion to such a small elite?" ("Bishops travel to the Synod," *TP*, 4 October 2015). Reporting about the Synod's deliberations, Konrad Sawicki noted that the majority of lay participants "keep themselves within the traditional family discourse" that is of little interest to the media. He went on to say that "it was good to hear from the happy and loving couples the story of fidelity to each other and to Church teachings, but this does not change the fact that it is necessary to hear from those lay people who have the courage to inform the clergy how things really are in today's society and what people really think" ("Czy biskupi zdążą," *TP*, 25 October 2015). This last sentence clearly indicates the author's priorities: first comes progressive discourse with its demands directed at the hierarchy of the Church, demands repeated ad nauseam by secular media. It is not surprising that non-Catholic media conduct this kind of discourse, but why has it been copied in a Catholic publication? Artur Sporniak, and he is not an exception, describes these "worldwide" desiderata as legitimate and calls them "the most urgent issues" ("Efekt Synodu," *TP*, 8 November 2015).

At the same time, *Tygodnik* did not offer publicity or approval to such appeals as those issued by the Forum of Catholic Communities or Jadwiga and Jacek Pulikowski's speech at the Synod. The Pulikowskis evaluation of the "worldwide desiderata" has been as follows: "The only effective way to assist sinners is to help them in achieving conversion and cessation of sinning. The return to chaste life and sacramental union with God will help them in regaining happiness in this world and the next." The Pulikowskis speak plainly: they say "yes" when yes is due, and "no" when they mean no. To *Tygodnik* writers this seems simplistic. They want to put exceptions on the same level as rules, and indeed liquidate the notion of rules altogether. After all, the entire progressive world is waiting for Pope Francis to bless behavior hitherto considered harmful to preservation of the traditional family—shouldn't we join them?

FRUITFUL AND FRUITLESS PEREGRINATIONS IN THE WILDERNESS

Here is my diagnosis of the illness to which *Tygodnik Powszechny* succumbed: this periodical has gradually lost its sense of purpose as it increasingly tried to please its “outside friends.” As a result, it has reached the state of total barrenness. My impression is that those external friends became friends on the condition that *TP* distanced itself not only from the conservative *Radio Maryja*, but also from the Catholic mainstream as defined by authoritative statements by John Paul II or Benedict XVI in the past, and today by authoritative statements of the Conference of the Polish Episcopacy and its president Bishop Stanisław Gądecki. *Tygodnik* people seem to compete with one another in ingratiating themselves to their external friends and they miss no opportunity to demonstrate their openness to ideas. As a result, the periodical has not only become politically correct, but it has also ceased to have any discernible internal leadership. In the various debates about moral and Church-related issues (recently the problem of so-called partnership unions, or the entertainer Nergal tearing up the Bible, or Pope Francis), one knows in advance what the *Tygodnik* stance will be. It will be identical to that of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, wrapped up in some Church-related packaging. *Tygodnik* continues to be an intelligentsia periodical, but one wonders whether it follows Emmanuel Mounier’s recommendation that it should serve the people who have the courage to think independently.

*Tygodnik’s* attempt to walk a thin line between being and not being in the Church has always been debatable, but it was also a source of its strength. “Peregrinations in the wilderness,” to use Fr. Józef Tischner’s expression, can be fruitful; those who walk in the wilderness often ask interesting questions. But it also can be fruitless if these questions are answered only in such a way as to please the contemporary world. *Tygodnik* used to be fruitful when the deepest inspiration of its writers was Catholic doctrine and when the goal was to articulate a Catholic perspective on the challenges of modernity. My impression is that this Catholic perspective has been abandoned and an open perspective adopted instead. Δ

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## Past Continuous A Novel

### Bronisław Wildstein

*Editor’s Note:* Bronisław Wildstein is a contemporary Polish novelist and journalist. A former dissident engaged with the Solidarity labor movement, he is the recipient of many prizes including the highest award of the Republic of Poland: the Order of the White Eagle (2016). The opening pages of his novel *Past Continuous* (*Czas niedokonany*, 2011) initiate the major plot lines of the novel, a work that is autobiographical yet at the same time expresses better than any other work of fiction the societal dilemmas of late communism and postcommunism. *Past Continuous*, presently being translated into English is a grand narrative that brings to mind Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago* and Vasilii Grossman’s *Forever Flowing*.

The flickering index numbers on Roman Brok’s monitor were taking a nosedive, apparently in free-fall. It seemed as though the computer had gone mad and wanted to throw off the virtual entities oppressing it. The screen filled with red. Roman instinctively glanced over at his neighbors’ computer screens, visible behind the flimsy, purely symbolic partitions that separated them, and had the impression he was in a hall of mirrors. At vertiginous speeds, in the grip of some nameless impulse, the machines were devaluing the transactions encoded in their bowels. The brokers’ faces, as they turned to exchange incredulous glances before turning back to their screens, all displayed the same astonishment, now tinged with panic.

It occurred to Roman suddenly that the computer screen was merely a thin sheet of glass. Beyond it, beyond the plunging index numbers next to the names of the corporations that moved swiftly across the tenuous surface, each accompanied by a little red triangle pointing downward—beyond that abstract world of numbers and letters and symbols, he saw unfinished buildings crashing to