The Roman Catholic Church and its Legal Position under the Provisional Government in Russia in 1917

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I

The almost insoluble problem of Roman catholicism in imperial Russia originated in Catherine II's seizure and occupation of the eastern and central lands of the multi-national commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania. After the partitions of 1772, 1793, and 1795 Catherine's empire embraced Lithuanian, Belorussian, and Polish peoples, whose religious affiliation differed essentially from that to the Russian orthodox church. Under the first partition Roman catholics in the territories concerned found themselves to their distress without the ministry of a Roman catholic bishop; the Greek catholics were more fortunate and had the archbishop of Polotsk, Jason Smogorzewski, within the new frontiers of the Russian empire. Characteristically, Catherine unilaterally solved the problem for the Roman catholics by appointing Stanislaw Siestrzencewicz-Bohusz as bishop of Belorussia in 1773, and by 1784 she had cleverly manoeuvred the papacy into creating the archdiocese of Mogilev with Siestrzencewicz-Bohusz as archbishop.1 The Greek catholics, though seemingly fortunate at first because of the presence of Archbishop Smogorzewski, soon felt the force of Catherine's hostility. Posing as the protectress of orthodoxy, she began a campaign of 'conversions', which were induced by every form of pressure at her command. She regarded the 'union' of Brest of 1595 as nothing more than a Polish 'invention': hence, the difficulties which she placed in the way of filling the archbishopric of Polotsk after Smogorzewski became metropolitan were merely a part of her design for destroying the Polish 'invention'.

1 For the establishment of the diocese of Belorussia, see Polnoye sobranije zakonov, XIX, no. 14,073; see also Jan Kurczewski, Biskupstwo, Vilna, 1912, pp. 85-6 f. For the documents relating to the establishment of the archdiocese of Mogilev, see M. J. Rouet de Journel, Les Nonciatures de Russie d'apres les documents, Paris, 1952, I, p. 259. For a characterisation of Archbishop Siestrzencewicz-Bohusz, see Jan Wasilewski, Arcybiskupi i Administratorow Archidiecezji Mohylowskiej, Pińsk, 1930, pp. 5-7, who represents him as a prelate typical of the Polish enlightenment.

The administrative reorganisation of both the Roman and Greek Catholic churches in Russia was completed during the reign of Paul I. The papal nuncio, Lorenzo Litta, arrived in St Petersburg in 1796 and, thanks to his skilful diplomacy, he was able to secure the canonical establishment of the Latin sees of Vilna, Samogitia, Lutsk, Kamenets and Minsk under the metropolitan authority of the archbishop of Mogilev. The Greek Catholic hierarchy was also reconstituted under the archbishop of Polotsk, and in addition to the archdiocesan see it included the dioceses of Brest and Lutsk. 3 Except for the suppression of individual dioceses and the erection of the diocese of Tiraspol', this remained the basic structure of the Latin hierarchy in Russia until its final destruction in 1923. The history of the Greek Catholic organisation was more tragic and brief. Except for the diocese of Kholm, which was finally suppressed in 1875, the Greek Catholic church and its hierarchy disappeared in the union of Polotsk of 1839 when Nicholas I used artifice and force to unite the Uniat church with the Russian Orthodox church. 4

From the very beginning the Catholic problem in Russia was associated with the Polish problem in the areas which remained outside the kingdom of Poland after 1815 and were regarded as integral parts of Russia proper. Thus the territories of the grand duchy of Lithuania which Russia had acquired in the partitions constituted an area in which the Catholic church was Polish in background, speech, and culture; and the violent reaction against the introduction of Russian in supplementary (non-liturgical) prayers in the Catholic churches of the empire shows that the laity also associated their religious and their national affiliation. During the 19th century the rising national consciousness of Lithuanians, Belorussians, and Ukrainians added to the already complex Catholic problem. For example, Catholic Belorussians and Catholic Ukrainians in Lvov wanted to see in the Uniat church a national church suited to their religious, cultural, and national aspirations.

The history of Catholicism in Russia during the 19th century was a history of constantly increasing government pressure. Official action ranged from outright destruction, as of the Greek Catholic church in 1839, through unilateral suppression of dioceses (e.g. Minsk and Kamenets), 5 to restrictions on freedom of ecclesiastical administration and contact with the holy see. The tsarist government severely circumscribed the authority of bishops and

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3 For the documents relating to the Roman Catholic church, see de Journel, op. cit., II, pp. 207–9, 237–8; Polnoye sobranie zakonov, XXV, no. 18,504; to the Greek Catholic church, de Journel, op. cit., II, p. 210; Polnoye sobranie zakonov, XXV, no. 18,503.

4 Polnoye sobranie zakonov, Sobraniye vtoroye, XII, otdeleniye pervoye, no. 9,825; XIV, no. 12,133.

5 Polnoye sobranie zakonov, Sobraniye vtoroye, XLI, otdeleniye vtoroye, no. 43,879.
tried to limit their contact with Rome to government channels.\textsuperscript{6} The religious orders faced confiscation and suppression of their houses.\textsuperscript{7} A lull came with the revolution of 1905 and its limited religious toleration; but even then the government penalised prelates like Bishop John Cieplak in a variety of ways for religious activities which it frowned upon.\textsuperscript{8}

The number of catholics in Russia decreased considerably during the 19th century. According to a report of Arezzo, the papal nuncio, there were 3,033,968 Roman and Greek catholics in Russia in 1802–1806; but the figures included only those receiving the sacraments. The Greek catholics among them numbered 1,398,478 and the Latin catholics 1,635,490.\textsuperscript{9} By 1917, on the eve of the revolution, the numbers had nearly halved to 1,597,411 catholics.\textsuperscript{10}

II

The outbreak of the February revolution in 1917 found the Romanov dynasty isolated from the populace of the empire. Even those who had benefited from Romanov rule, like the Russian orthodox church, failed to rally to the dynasty; and those who had suffered serious persecution at its hands were less likely still to spring to its defence. The holy synod of the Russian orthodox church adopted a cautious attitude towards the revolution. It felt that the revolution should give the Russian orthodox church autonomy in internal affairs, but should at the same time preserve for the church its dominant or favoured position as the church of the majority of the Russian people. The church courts, the church’s legislation on marriage and divorce, its records, its holidays, and its schools should remain untouched and be recognised by the government. The church authorities also thought that compulsory religious instruction should be retained in schools and that government subsidies for the church should be continued. The only areas of disagreement between the provisional government and the orthodox church proved to be the problem of parochial

\textsuperscript{6} For an excellent study of episcopal powers in tsarist Russia, see Walery Płoskiewicz, ‘Władza biskupów Rz.-katolickich w świetle prawodawstwa b. Imperium Rosyjskiego’ (\textit{Kościół Katolicki w Rosji: Materiały do jego historii i organizacji}, Warsaw, 1923, pp. 71–9).

\textsuperscript{7} Wasilewski, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 53–7, where a detailed list of suppressed monasteries and convents is given.

\textsuperscript{8} See Wasilewski, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 158, 169.


school, which the government hoped to nationalise, and the problem of compulsory religious instruction in non-religious schools.\textsuperscript{11}

The catholics greeted the February revolution with greater hopes than the orthodox, for the provisional government soon gave them reason to think that a better day was dawning. On 15 March 1917 the provisional government took a decisive step in Russian-Polish relations, which naturally included the question of the relations between the government and the catholic church in the archdiocese of Mogilev. What it did was to set up a commission for the liquidation of the affairs of the Polish kingdom, the chairman of which it was to appoint itself. Part of the commission’s membership was to consist of representatives from the ministries of internal affairs, foreign affairs, war, education, and justice. But it was also to include representatives of the leading Polish organisations in Russia. The commission’s task, as the government defined it, was to ascertain the location and condition of government properties and communal institutions in the kingdom of Poland; to prescribe the manner in which they were to be preserved and transferred to the Polish state; to indicate the procedure for liquidating government institutions functioning in the kingdom of Poland; to determine the mutual relations between the Russian government and the Roman catholic church in Russia as represented by the archbishop of Mogilev; and to solve the problem of Polish soldiers in the Russian army and of Polish prisoners-of-war. The government also authorised the commission to invite other government ministries and non-governmental groups to such of its meetings as might involve their interests. It appointed as chairman of the commission Alexander Lednicki, a distinguished Pole and St Petersburg lawyer, who enjoyed the confidence of both parties at this time.\textsuperscript{12} It was the chairman’s responsibility to report to the government on the commission’s work.

As the provisional government had outlined the commission’s structure and duties in general terms only, the commission itself had to settle most of the details of its organisation and work. According to the original plan, it was to consist of twenty-six members, thirteen of whom were to represent the Russian government, while thirteen Poles were to act for the Polish population in Russia. The government departments which were finally represented on the commission included internal affairs, foreign affairs, education, war and navy,

\textsuperscript{11} John S. Curtiss, \textit{The Russian Church and the Soviet State (1917–1950)}, Boston, 1953, pp. 14 and 18–19, a well documented work, but somewhat naive about bolshevik intentions towards the churches.

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Zhurnal Zasedaniya Vremennogo Pravitel’stva}, Petrograd, 1917, I, nos. 19–22, pp. 1–2; nos. 49–51, pp. 1–2. This important but neglected source is in the Hoover library, at Stanford university, Stanford, California; it will be referred to as \textit{ZhVP. Kurjer Polski}, 11 May 1917, henceforth cited as \textit{KP}; \textit{Kurjer Warszawski}, 16 April 1917, henceforth cited as \textit{KW}.
justice, agriculture, commerce and industry, finance, communications, the holy synod, the accounting commission, the legal department, and the commissariat of the former ministry of the imperial court. The wide representation of government departments illustrates the complexity of Polish problems in war-time Russia. On the other hand, only ten of the thirteen Polish members provided for served on the commission when it first started its work. They were Bishop Edward Ropp as representative of the Roman catholic church; I. Szebeko and J. Mrozowski as representatives of the council of congresses of Polish organisations for aid to war victims; Władysław Grabski and W. Jaroński as representatives of the central committee of the landed gentry; A. Babiański and W. Rawicz-Szczero as representatives of the Polish society for aid to war victims; A. Wierchchlejski as representative of the Polish committee in Moscow; J. Zdziechowski as representative of the agricultural credit society; and S. Światopełk-Czetwertyński as representative of the central agricultural society. 13

It was no easy matter to determine the competence of the commission in detail. A report by W. Grabski with a supplement by J. Mrozowski, which attempted to set out the rights of the commission with some precision, was discussed on 20 and 27 May and 7 June 1917 and was accepted by the commission with insignificant changes. It laid down that as the commission was an organ of the central government it should submit to the government its resolutions on matters concerned with government institutions functioning in the kingdom of Poland and with the preservation of government properties until they could be turned over to the future Polish state. If the government approved these resolutions, such approval would render them decisive and final. In order to locate and establish the condition of government properties, the commission was to do preparatory and investigative work, collecting and organising data to facilitate a decision whether the properties were subject to return to the Polish state. It interpreted the term ‘properties of government institutions of the kingdom of Poland’ as meaning all assets and obligations originating in or connected with the kingdom of Poland, all immovable as well as movable property belonging to government institutions functioning within the kingdom, and all sums deriving from the financial settlement by the Russian treasury with the future Polish state. Similarly, it interpreted the term ‘property of communal institutions of the kingdom of Poland’ in such a way as to cover the properties of communes, towns, philanthropic organisations and other juridical persons with a public character. As the commission

13 Sprawozdanie z Działalności Komisji Likwidacyjnej do Spraw Królestwa Polskiego za Czas od 15-Maja do 30 Sierpnia 1917 r. Petrogród, 1917, pp. 2–3; KW, 30 May 1917. The report of the liquidation commission, an extremely rare item is also in the Hoover library, Stanford, California.
had been deputed to 'define the manner of preserving and directing government and communal institutions of the kingdom of Poland until they are turned over to the Polish state', the report pointed out that it would need to create its own administrative staff for these properties. It also laid down that when determining the way in which Russian government institutions functioning in the kingdom were to be abolished the commission should treat each institution in detail, specifying its term and the means to be used to deal with it.

The commission, which faced an enormous task, tried to proceed with its work in an orderly fashion. From the outset it recognised the following seven important fields of activity: affairs connected with the former ministry of the court and appanages; affairs of the catholic church; affairs of military and civilian prisoners; affairs of municipal economy and institutions of public benevolence; land and peasant affairs; the staffs of institutions which were abolished; and questions of finance. The business arising from these many and varied problems laid a considerable burden of work on the commission, because the many Poles scattered throughout Russia, especially by the war, turned to the commission for advice and help. The policy of the chairman demanded that no letter or request should remain unanswered, and the volume of correspondence and business is suggested by the fact that on 26 July 1917 no less than 2,459 items were received by the commission and 2,379 sent out.

14 Sprawozdanie, pp. 4–5; KW, 22 June 1917. The Polish press followed events in Russia as closely as the war and revolution permitted.
15 Sprawozdanie, pp. 6 and 7–9; KW, 22 June 1917; Diodor Kolpinski, 'Początki Katolicyzmu wschodniego obrazdu w Rosji' (Kościół Katolicki w Rosji: Materiały do jego historii i organizacji, Warsaw, 1932, p. 92). In order to cope with the problems involved in these critical areas, the commission divided into twelve sections. Section I concerned itself with matters under the administration of the commissariat of the ministry of the court and appanages; its head was Alexander Lednicki himself. Section II dealt with the problems of the catholic church; its chairman was S. Kotlyarevsky, and its members Bishop Edward Ropp, A. Kartashev, S. Światopełk-Czetwertyński, Wł. Grabski, and J. Mikhaylovsky. The Roman, Armenian and Russian catholic interests formed the subject-matter of the section's deliberations. Besides the section's members, the following bishops were invited to meetings: Bishop John Cieplak, Bishop I. Dubowski, Bishop Michael Godlewski, Bishop Aloysius Kessler, and Exarch Leonid Fyodorov. The chairman of section III, which was concerned with the problem of military and civilian prisoners, was A. Babiański. Section IV on the municipal economy and institutions of public benevolence was presided over by J. Mrozowski. Land problems fell within the purview of section V, whose chairman was J. Zdziechowski. Section VI occupied itself with the evacuated personnel of the liquidated government institutions; its chairman was M. Shchukin. Section VII, the financial and control section, was under the chairmanship of Wł. Grabski. Section VIII was the legal section and was presided over by P. Gussakovsky. Section IX dealt with the problem of public instruction; here again A. Lednicki was the chairman. Among the interested persons invited by this section was Bishop John Cieplak, who represented the church's interest in education. Section X included in its sphere the problems of judicial and administrative institutions; once again, Alexander Lednicki acted as chairman. Section XI, which dealt with commerce and industry, had as its chairman W. Rawicz-Szczerbo. Finally, roads and communications came under section XII, whose chairman was M. Shchukin.
III

The task of regulating the relations between the Roman catholic church and the Russian government fell to the second section of the commission which was presided over by Bishop Edward Ropp. As the provisional government had abolished all religious and national restrictions, the second section assumed that the scope of its work included the elimination of restrictions imposed by the former tsarist government on the Roman catholic church and catholics in Russia and the removal of all misunderstandings between the catholic church and the Russian government. But it really regarded as its primary task to abrogate all connections between the Russian government and the catholic church in both the kingdom of Poland and Russia proper.

The investigative and preparatory work of the second section proceeded expeditiously, for the problems involved were well known to the members and consultants invited to the discussions such as, for example, Bishop Cieplak and Bishop Ropp. The materials needed were also easily obtainable. Hence the discussions proceeded quickly and it was possible to submit resolutions to the plenum of the commission with very little delay. The section addressed itself to a whole variety of problems. The plenum of the commission had already discussed the government’s unilateral removal of priests from parishes, and the second section undertook to draft a guarantee that in future the appointment of priests to parishes would depend entirely on the ecclesiastical authorities, who would merely inform the civil authorities of the nominations made. Tsarist legislation on mixed marriages also came under study. This legislation laid down that mixed marriages solemnised only before a catholic priest could not be recognised as valid unions, and that children of mixed marriages belonged to the orthodox confession, a position which created much hardship for the catholic parties in mixed marriages. Another problem which the second section tackled was the problem of catholic churches seized by the tsarist government. Here it decided that as the reasons for the seizure had been political the churches affected should be restored to the catholics. But at the same time it agreed that for the moment the decision should not be put into effect if orthodox services were really conducted in any of the churches concerned. Related matters which were also dealt with included the placing of memorials in churches, inscriptions on wayside crucifixes, and religious processions, all of which the imperial government had kept under close control. In the educational field, the section had to face the problems involved in religious instruction for catholic pupils and students, an issue which, surprising though it may seem, was connected with nationality.
In the past it had been the director of the gymnasium who had determined a pupil's nationality; and this decision was important because it also determined the choice of language in which pupils received their religious instruction. The right of the Roman catholic authorities to supervise religious instruction in schools had also to be studied and if possible guaranteed. Another matter which the second section took up was the right to establish monasteries and convents freely. But the representatives of the government departments asked that a final decision should be postponed until the government's general policy had been announced.  

After the second section had discussed the various problems, it brought its resolutions before the commission which very soon accepted a number of them, including some which were important. On 5 May 1917 a plenary session of the commission approved a resolution which revoked the imperial decrees of 5 June 1866 and 15 July 1869 suppressing the Kamenets-Podol'sk and Minsk dioceses, and a decree of 16 April 1883 placing the diocese of Minsk under the administration of the archbishop of Mogilev. The suppression of these dioceses had been canonically invalid, and the dioceses had continued to exist in the church's eyes, even though Vilna had assumed administration of the diocese of Kamenets and Mogilev that of Minsk. The vigorous action taken by catholics in the dioceses suggested that the suppression was by no means a dead issue: for example, the catholics of Minsk lost no time after the February revolution in asserting themselves and seeking the resurrection of their diocese. On 8 April 1917 they held a meeting in the Minsk theatre under the chairmanship of the head of the city, Stanislaw Chrzątkowski, and were told that Bishop Cieplak, administrator of the archdiocese of Mogilev and the diocese of Minsk, had energetically begun to revive the diocese, and that Prince L'vov, president of the council of ministers, had promised all possible government assistance. A thousand signatures were called for to indicate that the catholics of the diocese supported the project, and the meeting voted a declaration thanking the provisional government for decreeing religious freedom and toleration and asking it to restore the diocese of Minsk. The resolutions adopted were sent to Bishop Cieplak by means of a delegation and Bishop Cieplak in his turn raised the matter with the provisional government.

As far as official circles were concerned, the initiative for the restoration of the Minsk and Kamenets-Podol'sk dioceses came from the liquidation commission, which had sent the government its own

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17 Dziennik piotrogradzki, 16 May 1917, a very rare copy of the St Petersburg Polish daily; Sprawozdanie, pp. 24-5.
18 KW, 15 May 1917.
resolution on the matter. On 21 May the government for its part voted to revoke the suppression decrees as well as the decree of 16 April 1883 uniting the catholic church of the Minsk guberniya with the archdiocese of Mogilev.\textsuperscript{19} Pope Benedict XV appointed as the new bishop of Minsk the Reverend Zygmunt Łoziński who had been born in the Novogrudok guberniya and had acted as professor at the theological academy in St Petersburg; but his consecration did not take place until August 1918. In 1917 his diocese of Minsk had about 292,000 catholics and 82 churches.\textsuperscript{20} In 1919 the pope also appointed the Reverend Peter Mankowski as bishop of the diocese of Kamienets, in the re-establishment of which Bishop I. Dubowski of Lutsk-Zhitomir had specially interested himself. In 1913 it included about 101 churches, and 312,102 catholics.\textsuperscript{21}

Other problems which hampered catholic life in Russia also clamoured for attention. For instance, on 13 May 1917 a plenary session of the commission dealt with the enforced registration of conversions to Roman catholicism from the orthodox faith based on the requirements of Russian law. Until the government could prepare a final law of its own on religious toleration and freedom, the commission recommended a temporary arrangement with two main provisions. Firstly, any person over fourteen who left the orthodox communion to join the catholic church was to make an oral or written statement before the appropriate civilian official, who was to inform the ecclesiastical authorities concerned. Secondly, if one of the parents belonged to the Roman catholic church and the other parent left the orthodox church to join the catholic church, children under fourteen should be deemed to belong to the catholic church, provided the ecclesiastical authorities of the catholic church considered them as such.

The commission’s concern with conversion from orthodoxy to catholicism was intended to relieve the minds of many perplexed people as quickly as possible, for no one knew just when the expected decree on freedom of conscience would be issued. Earlier, the decree on religious toleration of 17 April 1905 had been interpreted in a restrictive sense by a circular of the minister of internal affairs dated 18 August 1905, which was the product of government fears induced by mass conversions to catholicism after the decree’s publication. Under it the prospective convert had to announce himself to the government authorities, who informed the authorities of the orthodox church. He was then subjected to a thirty-day ‘admonition’, and only if it proved ineffective would the government regard him as a catholic.

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{ZZVP}, I, no. 86, pp. 64–5.
\textsuperscript{20} Wasilewski, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 185; \textit{Polska}, 11 August 1918.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Polska}, 1 December 1918.
It was because of the limitations on toleration under the 1905 decree that a new decree was considered to be necessary.

On 20 May 1917 the commission approved the regulation proposed by its second section for the building, enlargement, and renovation of Catholic churches. The general regulations on public building and buildings naturally had to be observed; but in future the furnishing of Roman Catholic domestic chapels and movable altars as well as Roman Catholic services were to be subject to the decision of the Roman Catholic authorities alone. Collections for the building, enlarging, and renovating of Catholic churches and chapels were also to depend on the consent of the Catholic ecclesiastical authorities. New parishes were to be established by the diocesan authorities of the church; but the local authorities had to be informed. At the meeting of 20 May the commission also agreed to revoke the following article of the law on foreign confessions: 'In cases where the activity of persons belonging to the Roman Catholic Church appears injurious from the point of view of government order or the peaceful course of religious life among the local population, the Minister of Internal Affairs must communicate with the appropriate Roman Catholic diocesan authorities to take suitable measures to halt the injurious activity of the persons concerned. If the diocesan authorities fail to take such measures, or if the Minister of Internal Affairs considers the measures to be insufficient, the Minister is to inform the appropriate diocesan authorities that the clerical person in question is removed from his office; the diocesan authorities must then take the necessary steps to execute the above demand.' This law had enabled the government to insist on the removal of priests on purely political grounds, and although it was originally directed against the Catholic clergy, it had been extended during the war to cover Protestant pastors and clergy as well.22

IV

As the commission's work was essentially preparatory, its resolutions had to be submitted to and approved by the Russian provisional government in order to become law. The basis for its activity was the provisional government's recognition of an independent Poland as part of the future European settlement, which was given on 16 March 1917. The provisional government had also entrusted the commission with the task of establishing regular relations between the Roman Catholic church in Russia and the Russian state. The result was that the government faithfully implemented the recommendations which the commission submitted to it.

22 Sprawozdanie, pp. 24–5; KW, 1 July 1917.
The government first of all undertook the task of restoration by undoing the more drastic acts of the defunct tsarist government. On 9 May 1917 it freed Edward Ropp (1851–1939), the bishop of Vilna, from the sentence of exile imposed by an imperial decree of 1 October 1907 and restored him to his office and his diocese. He had become bishop of Vilna in 1903 and had been many-sided in his activities. He had supported the catholic press, defended priests who were persecuted by the government, and opposed socialism. On 7 February 1906 he also founded the constitutional catholic party, whose programme demanded freedom of communication between bishops and the holy see, diocesan rule according to canon law, recognition of ecclesiastical courts, introduction of religious orders, brotherhoods and religious societies, adequate salaries for the clergy, suppression of the ecclesiastical college, a free hand for the bishops in educating their clergy, and exemption of catholics from taxes for the support of the orthodox church. So great was Vilna’s confidence in its bishop that the electorate sent him to the duma as its deputy. But his activity eventually led to his exile by administrative sentence on 5 October 1907. His most serious ‘offences’ in the government’s eyes were first, his organisation of the catholic constitutional party; secondly, his ignoring of the russification policy of the tsarist government; thirdly, his signing with 49 other duma delegates of a declaration on freedom of conscience and religion; and lastly his nationalist activity in ‘polonising’ the Lithuanians and Belorussians in the north-western regions of Russia. For these ‘crimes’ he spent ten years in exile until his recall by the provisional government.

The return of Bishop Ropp from exile provided the beginnings of a solution for another problem, namely, the vacancy in the archdiocese of Mogilev, which was under the care of an administrator, Bishop John Cieplak, a distinguished cleric and leader. At the instance of the ministry of internal affairs, the government instructed the minister of foreign affairs on 20 May 1917 to enter into diplomatic contacts with the Roman curia in order to have Bishop Ropp nominated archbishop of Mogilev and metropolitan of the Roman catholic church in Russia. On 25 July 1917 Pope Benedict XV made the nomination, and on 2 December 1917 the archbishop formally took up his new office, showing the energy and zest of a much younger man in both the religious and political fields. He had already helped to draw up the basic law to regulate church-state relations in the new Russia and had served as a member of the liquidation commission. In the political sphere he organised the Christian democratic

23 ŽŽVP, I, no. 73, p. 10.
25 Ibid., p. 180; ŽŽVP, I, no. 84, p. 3; Ministerstvo vnitrných del. Projevty i predpolozheniya ministerstva, 29 July 1917, no. 3879, p. 1. The papal documents were published in the first issue of the archdiocesan paper, Kronika archidiecezji Mołdowskiej, January 1918.
party, which began to show surprising strength in the districts along the Neva river. He also divided Siberia and central Russia into deaneries in order to facilitate the administration of his huge archdiocese, which was perhaps the largest in the world.

In national affairs the archbishop was a thorough Pole in both feeling and outlook. But in ecclesiastical matters he was a strong opponent of nationalism and partisanship and would have no 'privileged' language or rite in the church. He was anxious that the church should not become the arena of nationalist conflicts, and his co-operation with the Russian synod of catholic clergy of the eastern rite, which met in St Petersburg under the presidency of Metropolitan Andrew Szczyptycki, indicated his wide tolerance and friendliness towards the eastern church. Once he became archbishop of Mogilev, he assisted the clergy of the eastern rite in every way. For example, he ordained deacons for the eastern church and supported it by material means, for he saw in it possibilities for successful catholic activity in Russia. But the bolshevik revolution put an end to these seemingly substantial dreams.  

When Bishop Ropp was elevated to the archbishopric of Mogilev, the question arose of the now vacant see at Vilna. On 29 July the minister of internal affairs, S. Kotlyarevsky, proposed to the provisional government the name of Bishop John Cieplak, administrator of the archdiocese of Mogilev. Monsignor Cieplak had completed his theological studies at the theological academy in St Petersburg and had served as a professor of dogmatic theology from 1882 till 1908. From 1904 to 1907 he had also represented the Kielce diocese in the ecclesiastical college in St Petersburg. He was subsequently made an auxiliary bishop of Archbishop Apolinary Wnukowski of Mogilev and had carried out the first episcopal visitation of Siberia, which was part of the archdiocese of Mogilev. When Archbishop Winceny Kluczyński resigned from the archiepiscopal office in 1914, Bishop Cieplak ruled the archdiocese as administrator until the appointment of Archbishop Ropp. In view of his past services the provisional government had asked the holy see to grant him the personal rank of an archbishop; and the ministry of internal affairs now urged the provisional government to approach the Vatican again for the nomination of Bishop Cieplak to the see of Vilna. 

The bolshevik coup of November 1917 frustrated the idea. But Archbishop Ropp subsequently asked the holy see to make Bishop Cieplak a titular archbishop, which it did by naming him titular archbishop of Ochrid.

27 Ministerstwo wnutrennich del. Proekty i predpolozeniya ministerstva, 29 July 1917, no. 3879, pp. 1–2; ЗВП, II, no. 128, p. 18, no. 150, p. 11.
28 Wasilewski, op. cit., p. 171.
Even after the restoration of its dioceses and bishops, the catholic church still had claims on the government arising out of the seizure of some of its churches during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Many of these churches had been forcibly converted into orthodox churches, and the Roman catholic church section of the liquidation commission considered that they ought now to be restored to the catholics. A move of this kind was bound to be opposed by the orthodox hierarchy and encounter difficulties arising from the fact that the orthodox had been in possession of the churches for many years. For example, some former catholics would almost certainly prefer to remain in the orthodox communion, which in the course of time they had come to adopt as their own. But in spite of the difficulties the provisional government showed its good will by at least beginning the restoration of catholic property and allowing catholic churches to extend their holdings. On 27 July 1917 it approved the restoration of a capuchin monastery at Vinnitsa in Podolia to which its church and all its property were to be returned. 29 On 28 August 1917 it also voted to restore to the catholic church in Berdichev the Carmelite monastery suppressed in 1866. 30 It further agreed that the Samara catholic church could accept the legacy of an engineer called Chilikiński who had willed his home to the church for the establishment of a school and orphanage for Roman catholic children. 31 St Catherine's church in St Petersburg similarly received the government's permission to acquire property for the establishment of a Roman catholic shrine and school. 32

Though these efforts at restitution were small in comparison with the enormous losses of the church in the 19th century, they none the less illustrate the goodwill of the government, overwhelmed as it was by problems arising out of the war, the disruptive efforts of the formerly oppressed nationalities, and the revolutionary temper of the population, especially the peasantry. But the government's various measures remained disconnected and unorganised; and what was really needed was the systematic organisation of relations between the government and the Roman catholic church in Russia and between the government and the sovereign catholic authorities in Rome. These relations could be based only on the freedom of religion. On 14 July 1917 the government had issued a decree which guaranteed freedom of conscience to every citizen of the Russian state. This meant that the use of political and civil rights was in no way dependent on religious affiliation, and that no one could be persecuted or restricted in his rights on account of his religious affiliation. The decree also provided that the religious affiliation

31 Ibid., no. 127, pp. 2–3. 32 Ibid., no. 110, p. 17.
of children under nine years of age was to be determined by their parents. If the parents disagreed, their children were to belong to the father's faith. If parents separated, the children were to take the faith of the parent with whom they stayed. If the parents were dead or unknown, or if it proved impossible to establish the actual religious affiliation of a child, its guardians or those who adopted it were to decide which faith it was to take. In this way the decree safeguarded the religious freedom of all citizens, including children.

The thorny question of passing from one religious confession to another had also to be tackled. The decree on freedom of conscience declared that those who had reached the age of fourteen needed no permission or declaration from any authority to join another religion or to have no religion at all. Any legal obligations and relations, such for example as taxes, flowing from membership of a religious group would be terminated by an oral or written statement to the local court. The law also provided for those who did not join any religious group at all. They had merely to inform the local administration which in turn was to communicate with the appropriate parish or religious body. Children under the age of nine were to be allowed to transfer their religious allegiance when both their parents did the same. But if only one parent joined another religion and no agreement could be reached between the parents on their children's faith, the children were to remain in the confession of which they were members. On the other hand, children over nine years of age could not be enrolled in another faith without their consent. The decree also declared that the civil acts of persons with no religious affiliation fell within the competence of the organs of local administration in accordance with a decree of 17 October 1906, which prescribed the procedures and rules for old believers and sects. 33

This decree on freedom of conscience laid the basis of religious freedom not only for catholics but for all the peoples of Russia. The Roman catholics in Russia were however in a peculiar position in that the great majority of them were Poles and that they all owed religious allegiance to authorities outside Russia. This meant that their relations with the Russian government called for special attention. On 17 June 1917, at the instance of Alexander Lednicki, chairman of the liquidation commission, the government ordered the minister of the interior to elaborate a draft law incorporating the changes already recommended in the existing laws governing relations between church and state in the Russian empire. 34 The ministry wasted no time and was able to give the government a draft for discussion on 26 July 1917. As approved, the new law on freedom

33 Ibid., no. 131, pp. 8–10. 34 Ibid., no. 111, pp. 36–7.
of association was comprehensive and dealt with the whole range of
catholic problems from church building to the appointment of
bishops, For example, it laid down that the restoration of old churches,
the collection of voluntary offerings for the building or repair of
churches or other religious needs, and the creation of parishes were
to be left to the appropriate Roman catholic authorities, and that
the civil authorities were merely to be informed of what was taking
place.\textsuperscript{35} On the appointment of bishops it said that the archbishop
of Mogilev, diocesan bishops, bishops with the right of succession,
and apostolic administrators were to be named by the apostolic see
in agreement with the Russian government, but that candidates were
to be put forward to the apostolic see by the local clergy. The appoint-
ment of other categories of prelates, however, was not to need the
agreement of the Russian government.\textsuperscript{36}

The new law also dealt with the creation of new dioceses and
related problems. The immense area of the archdiocese of Mogilev
made it very difficult to exercise the ministry; hence the supreme
authority of the holy see in the creation of new dioceses was at last
recognised and could now be invoked to establish new dioceses
wherever they were needed. But negotiations with the government
would still be necessary over the expenses involved in setting up a
new diocese.\textsuperscript{37} The law further provided that the archbishop and the
diocesan bishops were to appoint an official to preside over their
consistories and a secretary to run their chanceries. These officers,
gether with the members of the consistory and the chancery clerks,
could be laity or clerics of the Roman catholic faith. But the local
civilian authorities had to be informed of their appointment.\textsuperscript{38}

When founding schools, the Roman catholic authorities were to
be subject to the general laws for establishing private educational
institutions.\textsuperscript{39} But seminaries, with their courses of theological and
general instruction, their discipline, and their choice of students,
now came within the exclusive competence of the diocesan authori-
ties. Appointments to rectorships, inspectorships, and professorships
on the other hand had to be notified to the local civilian authorities.
In order to enter a seminary students must have completed the four
classes of the middle school. During their course or after its comple-
tion they had also to pass an examination in Russian language,
Russian history, and geography corresponding to the fifth and sixth
classes of the middle school.\textsuperscript{40} The new law recognised the Roman
catholic ecclesiastical academy as the higher institution of learning
for the catholic clergy. The administration of the academy was

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., no. 140, pp. 48, 8 and 48–9.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., no. 140, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., no. 140, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., no. 140, pp. 51–2.
entrusted to the diocesan bishops; but its immediate supervision devolved on the archbishop-metropolitan who appointed the rector after consultation with the diocesan bishops and with the consent of the government. Appointments to professorships however and to other posts in the academy had merely to be notified to the government. Only those who had completed the regular course of training were to be admitted to the academy; and the stipend which they received was to be fixed by the archbishop after consultation with the diocesan bishops. It was also to be the archbishop who conferred scholastic degrees. The law also gave the diocesan bishops the right to supervise religious instruction in the schools of their diocese. The language used for religious instruction was to be the native language of the pupil, and it was to be determined by the pupil's parents or guardians. Schools which gave no religious instruction in the Roman catholic faith were to introduce it if parents or guardians asked for it.

Under the tsars one serious injustice to the catholics in Russia had been the forcible suppression of monastic institutions. The law on freedom of association now remedied this by permitting the formation of Roman catholic organisations of every kind: societies, brother-hoods, clerical congregations, and monastic orders. This gave the catholics reason to hope that the future would see a renascence of the catholic religious orders which had once been such a common feature of catholicism in the lands of the former commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania.

V

Such was the history of the relations of the Roman catholic church in Russia with the provisional government. But it still does not give a complete picture of the development of catholicism. In the western gubernii, for example, the opening of schools among the Poles, who formed a majority of the population, went on apace; and although these schools were essentially Polish rather than catholic, they included the Roman catholic faith as an integral part of their educational programme. The widespread creation of such schools in 1917–18 points to the strength of catholicism in the so-called border areas. In Kiev, Podolia, and Volynia, for instance, the Poles established thirty-six gymnasiums, a university in Kiev, and nine professional secondary schools. The number of primary schools established was 500 in Volynia, 546 in Podolia, and 194 in the

41 Ibid., no. 140, pp. 52–3.
42 Ibid., no. 140, pp. 53–4; Anton Około-Kułak, Kościół w Rosji dawniej i obecnie i w przyszłości, Cracow, 1928, pp. 24–5.
43 ZZZP, II, no. 140, p. 50.
Ukraine, with a total of 73,688 pupils and 1,663 teachers. In December 1917 Vilna also had sixty primary schools with 7,000 pupils. By contrast only 500 Polish primary schools existed in the whole of the territory occupied by the Germans. In the Minsk guberniya seven secondary schools existed in Minsk itself and one each in Borisov, Lozaysk, Igumen, Bobruysk, Slutsk, Nesvizh, Mozyr', and Dokshitse. In the Mogilev guberniya the Poles opened 200 primary schools as well as two secondary schools at Mogilev and Orsha.\textsuperscript{44} The primary schools were supported by voluntary contributions from the Polish peasants.

Catholic public opinion acclaimed the new relationship between church and state, for the catholics interpreted it as meaning the liberation of the Roman catholic church and the elimination of the qualities which had made the tsarist Russian state barbaric.\textsuperscript{45} The restoration and restitution were undoubtedly small and bore no comparison to the losses inflicted on the church in the 19th century. But the efforts of the government clearly indicated its good will and presaged a better future for the catholics in Russia. Though the provisional government has often been criticised for its failure in nationality and peasant affairs, the settlement which it made with the Roman catholic church illustrates statesmanship at its best and suggests the kind of solution which the government intended to provide if Russia had not been overwhelmed by the bolshevik revolution.

But the destruction of the previous century could perhaps not have been undone even with the best of efforts. It was impossible by law to restore catholicism to those who had been assimilated into the orthodox church, or to reinstate the hundreds of monks in their monasteries even if the monasteries themselves could have been made available. Nor could legislation resurrect overnight the churches, priests, and laity, now lost to the catholic church. The very organisation of the section of the liquidation commission dealing with catholic problems suggests in itself the vast damage inflicted on the church: freedom of clerical appointment and activity, marriage laws, stolen church property, religious instruction for catholics, the building of churches and monasteries. All these problems centred round the restoration of the church to a position of freedom from a position of inferiority. Yet how their complexities could have been resolved in practice must remain in the realm of the hypothetical.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{44} W. Konopczyński, ‘Polish Institutions in Lithuania and Ruthenia’ (\textit{The Eastern Provinces of Poland}, Paris, 1918, pp. 47–51).
\textsuperscript{45} KP, 12 October 1917. The Vatican also expressed itself optimistically about future relations, \textit{KW}, 2 April 1917.
\textsuperscript{46} The material for this article was gathered at the Hoover library, Stanford university, where the assistance of Professor Witold Sworakowski of Stanford, was invaluable. The Ford foundation provided the financial support necessary for the research.