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Polish National Catholic-Episcopal Relations: Some Historical Observations

The termination of intercommunion between the Polish National Catholic Church (PNCC) and the Protestant Episcopal Church (PECUSA) in 1978 clearly represents a major reversal in the development of Old Catholic-Anglican relations. Rather paradoxically, however, the break has had some positive effects, for it has compelled members of both churches to reexamine the problematic aspects of their relationship. Historical studies of PNCC-PECUSA relations can assist this process, particularly if they consider the overall socio-economic and doctrinal *milieux* in which these relations evolved. Fr. Platt's essay sheds much light on the formal development of intercommunion between 1946 and 1958. However, it is equally important that we consider the state of relations prior to 1946 and also analyze with greater precision developments after 1958. In this way we can see that the origins of the break long antedated 1978 and involved major, albeit usually implicit, disagreements over the meaning of intercommunion. Such a broader approach to the topic also will help answer – or at least clarify – the questions posed by Fr. Platt regarding the propriety of the PNCC's conduct vis-à-vis PECUSA.

Most Anglicans and Old Catholics are unaware that concrete efforts to establish intercommunion in North America preceded the Bonn Agreement by thirty years. Though this attempt failed, it merits at least brief mention, for in many ways it set the stage for the subsequent development of PNCC-PECUSA relations. Chicago's Bishop Antoni Kozłowski, whom the Old Catholics had consecrated in 1897, submitted a "Memorial" to PECUSA requesting intercommunion in 1901. The bishop hoped that intercommunion would secure moral and material support for his movement. Some Episcopalians, most notably Bishop Charles C. Grafton of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, warmly endorsed this endeavor, largely because it would strengthen Anglo-Catholic influence within PECUSA.¹

This proposal did not meet with a favorable reception. PECUSA's bishops referred the question to a committee, where it languished. The plan stimulated opposition from Fr. Franciszek Hodur of Scranton, Pennsylvania, who disputed Bishop Kozłowski's leadership of Polish

¹ Laurence J. Orzell, "Curious Allies: Bishop Antoni Kozłowski and the Episcopalians", *Polish American Studies* 40 (1983), 47–48.

religious dissidents in America. Even the European Old Catholics opposed the plan. Bishop Kozłowski nonetheless pursued his goal. However, by 1903 it became clear that he could achieve intercommunion only if he entered PECUSA as a suffragan bishop for the Poles and agreed to the eventual incorporation of his community into the Episcopal Church. The Polish prelate went far to meet these demands, but PECUSA still took no action on his petition prior to his death in 1907.²

This abortive attempt at rapprochement is important, for it left a lasting impression on the collective psyche of Polish National Catholics: anxiety that intercommunion would erode their cultural and theological identity and eventually lead to their disappearance as a distinct group. Balanced against this, however, was the belief that intercommunion with PECUSA – a much wealthier church that drew many of its followers from the upper classes – could help the PNCC attain greater status and visibility on the American religious landscape. These two perceptions coexisted uneasily and shaped the subsequent development of PNCC-PECUSA relations.

Most of Bishop Kozłowski's followers joined Fr. Hodur, who received episcopal consecration from the Old Catholics in 1907. Bishop Hodur had considerable respect for PECUSA but was committed to the preservation of his movement as a propagator of Polish ethnic consciousness and a liberator from the perceived shackles of Roman Catholicism. To the extent that relations with Old Catholics and Episcopalians assisted his struggle, he favored their development. However, he would prove extremely chary of any measures that could divert his church from its mission as he understood it.³

The complex interplay of the two perceptions mentioned above manifested itself long before the establishment of Anglican-Old Catholic intercommunion in Europe under the terms of the Bonn Agreement. Several Polish National Catholic and Episcopal clergy maintained cordial contacts, and in 1910 three PNCC priests formally asked PECUSA to promote "friendly relations" between the two churches. PECUSA thereupon established a committee charged with "the establishment of Christian fellowship and intercommunion" be-

² Ibid., pp. 49–58.

³ For a discussion of the PNCC's origins, see Laurence J. Orzell, "The 'National Catholic' Response: Franciszek Hodur and his Followers, 1897–1907", in *The Polish Presence in Canada and America*, ed. Frank Renkiewicz (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1982), pp. 117–135.

tween Episcopalians and Polish National Catholics.⁴ Bishop Hodur apparently supported this effort, at least initially. He received great encouragement from Bishop James H. Darlington of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, whom the Polish prelate described as “the best friend of our cause in America”.⁵ Bishop Darlington regarded his Polish colleague as a “friend” and sought to involve him in PECUSA’s ecumenical activities.⁶ Moreover, each prelate visited the other on ceremonial occasions.⁷

Unfortunately, this developing rapprochement ran aground on the shoals of Episcopal insistence that the PNCC play a subordinate role in any partnership. Bishop Hodur met with a committee of PECUSA bishops, but he rejected the concept of intercommunion advanced by Bishop Charles P. Anderson of Chicago, who led the Episcopal delegation. Bishop Anderson recommended that the PNCC unite with PECUSA and that Bishop Hodur become an Episcopal prelate responsible for “Polish affairs”. Not surprisingly, the PNCC found this unacceptable.⁸ Other reasons bulked large in the PNCC’s refusal to consider intercommunion with PECUSA at this time. Most Polish National Catholics, at least during the 1920s, regarded PECUSA as basically a Protestant denomination.⁹ Moreover, Bishop Hodur was extremely sensitive to charges emanating from Roman Catholics that the PNCC had solicited funds from Protestants.¹⁰ Closer ties with PECUSA would appear to lend credence to such allegations. Socioeconomic factors militated against PNCC-PECUSA cooperation in other ways as well. Writing in 1928, Bishop Hodur noted that contacts with Episcopalians could be “harmful” and that he had “restricted” them to a “minimum”. As he explained, he feared that the great disparity in clerical salaries might cause PNCC priests to join the considerably wealthier PECUSA.¹¹

⁴ *Journal of the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church ... 1910* (n.p., 1910), pp. 131–132, 186–187.

⁵ Quoted in Bishop Edouard Herzog, Bern, to Archbishop Franciscus Keninck, Utrecht, 10 June 1920, Archives of the Archbishops of Utrecht, Utrecht (hereafter abbreviated *AAU*), File “Episcopalians and Old Catholics, 14/6”.

⁶ Darlington to J. P. C. van den Bergh, Utrecht, 8 March 1920, *AAU*, 14/6.

⁷ See, e.g., *Rola Boża* (Scranton, Pa.), 24 May 1930, p. 163.

⁸ *Rola Boża*, 10 May 1930, p. 156.

⁹ See, e.g., *Rola Boża*, 18 February 1928, pp. 54–55.

¹⁰ See, e.g., *Rola Boża*, 28 November 1925, pp. 371–372; 10 July 1926, p. 221; 25 December 1926, pp. 406–407; 30 April 1927, pp. 142–143.

¹¹ *Rola Boża*, 24 November 1928, pp. 381–382.

The Bonn Agreement therefore posed a challenge to the PNCC. Bishop Hodur's strategy towards PECUSA during 1931 and for some time afterwards was to maintain a cordial relationship short of intercommunion. The PNCC press did not publish the Bonn accord and instead stressed the fact that friendly relations between Anglicans and Old Catholics represented a "recognition" of the PNCC by the "powerful" and "influential" Church of England and PECUSA.¹² Significantly, neither the PNCC's leader, nor Bishop Jan Jasinski, who – along with Bishop Walenty Gawrychowski – had attended the September 1931 session of the International Bishops' Conference (IBC) that effectively ratified the Bonn Agreement, interpreted the accord as binding in North America. Bishop Jasinski's published reports on the IBC meeting stated that while the Old Catholics had recognized the validity of Anglican orders, the prelates had *not* taken any definitive action on the implementation of intercommunion; the final decision therefore remained in the hands of the various Old Catholic bishops.¹³ PNCC-PECUSA contacts during the 1930s remained largely confined to attendance by representatives of one church at important functions of the other.¹⁴ The European Old Catholics, for their part, acknowledged that the PNCC had "not yet accepted" the Bonn Agreement.¹⁵

The failure to implement the Bonn accord in North America did not stem solely from attitudes within the PNCC, however, for PECUSA had several reservations of its own regarding intercommunion. Barriers of language and class certainly played a role in keeping the two churches apart. According to one PECUSA historian, "a certain amount of plain Protestant Episcopal snobbishness – dislike for association with a body composed of recent immigrants, many of them mere mine workers – was a strong force against intercommunion".¹⁶

¹² *Rola Boża*, 31 October 1931, pp.345–346. See also *Rola Boża*, 25 July 1931, p.234; 19 September 1931, p.296; 17 October 1931, p.332.

¹³ *Rola Boża*, 28 November 1931, p.382; 30 January 1932, pp.46–47. The 1931 IBC session was not a "synod" in the strict sense so far as the PNCC was concerned. Bishop Jasinski voted in favor of intercommunion at the 1931 meeting, but this fact apparently was not published in the PNCC until fifteen years later. See *Rola Boża*, 26 October 1946, p.775.

¹⁴ See, e.g., *Rola Boża*, 22 November 1930, p.374; 9 May 1931, p.155; 27 June 1931, pp.205–206; 17 August 1935, pp.278–279.

¹⁵ "Society of St. Willibrord: Annual Report, 1936", Lambeth Palace Library, London, Douglas Papers, Vol.75, pp.24–27.

¹⁶ George E. DeMille, *The Episcopal Church Since 1900* (New York: Morehouse-Gorham, 1955), p.62.

Thus, only a relatively small group of Anglo-Catholics demonstrated any real interest in the PNCC.

Even Anglo-Catholics within PECUSA had several doubts regarding the PNCC's doctrinal stance. In a tract designed to acquaint Episcopalians with the Old Catholic movement, an Episcopal clergyman obliquely alluded to "certain suspicions of irregularity in doctrine and polity" within the PNCC. Once these were "removed", he continued, "the relation of the Episcopal and Polish [National] Catholic Churches will be so close as to form practically one organization".¹⁷ Such an assessment indicated that Episcopal thinking had not evolved very far since the turn of the century, when intercommunion was viewed as but the first step in a process of organizational and doctrinal unity.

These doctrinal reservations primarily involved the "Confession of Faith" published by Bishop Hodur in 1913 and subsequently approved at several PNCC Synods. The Confession expressed a rather imprecise view of the Trinity and was widely regarded as endorsing universalism. Largely for these reasons the document had disturbed the European Old Catholics. Despite Bishop Hodur's assurances that it represented "only an opinion" rather than a dogmatic statement per se, the Confession was generally considered, both inside and outside the PNCC, as a normative summary of Polish National Catholic doctrine.¹⁸ In 1932 Bishop Jasinski attempted to assuage European anxieties by drafting a "Brief Summary of the Doctrine of the Polish National Catholic Church of America" that made no reference to the Confession; he probably had Anglicans in mind as well, for parts of his statement drew heavily upon the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral.¹⁹

Not surprisingly, this situation also caused some consternation in North American Anglo-Catholic circles and impeded the implementation of intercommunion. For instance, Fr. Anton Mueller, a canon at Milwaukee's Episcopal cathedral, wrote to the European Old Catholics about the matter in 1936. He objected to what he described as the

¹⁷ William Chauncey Emhardt, *Old Catholics Are Essential to Reunion* (New York: National Council, Protestant Episcopal Church, n.d.), p. 14.

¹⁸ For a discussion of the European Old Catholic reaction to the Confession, see Laurence J. Orzell, "Eschatology in the PNCC", *Rola Boża*, 8 October 1988, p. 5.

¹⁹ Enclosure to Jasinski to Kenninck, 10 May 1932, *AAU*, File "North America, Fr. Hodur II (1909-1936), 14/10".

creed's adoption of "Sabellianism" and "Apocatastasis". Moreover, he expressed the "semi-official" view that PECUSA would be unable to establish intercommunion with the PNCC so long as the status of this "strange yet typically Polish Confession" remained unresolved.²⁰

These doctrinal questions persisted, but they effectively grew irrelevant after the outbreak of World War II and the concomitant onset of an effort on the part of Episcopalians to establish intercommunion. This time the PNCC proved far more receptive, but the reasons are not abundantly clear. Nor is it clear what internal deliberations on the question, if any, occurred within the PNCC. Bishop Jasinski attended PECUSA's General Convention in 1940 and discussed intercommunion, but the PNCC press did not mention the latter at this time.²¹ Indications of improving relations nonetheless multiplied, such as practical cooperation between the two churches relating to the war effort and a renewed appreciation of both the status that affiliation with PECUSA could secure for the PNCC and the possible benefits of ecumenical involvement for missionary activity in postwar Poland.²² These doubtless encouraged a more positive attitude towards intercommunion within the Polish National Catholic leadership.

The changing socio-cultural identity of many Polish National Catholics also served to erode hitherto existing barriers. Despite Bishop Hodur's efforts, linguistic assimilation and *embourgeoisement* were proceeding apace, and the increased geographical mobility stemming from military service and the wartime economy encouraged cultural integration as well. This, in turn, raised the question of pastoral care for Polish National Catholics who resided far from existing PNCC parishes. Finally, the PNCC's leader, who would celebrate his eightieth birthday in 1946, had grown increasingly infirm. Willingly or otherwise, he effectively yielded to the advice of younger prelates such as Bishop Jasinski on the question of intercommunion. For its part, PECUSA had judiciously ceased to suggest, at least publicly, that intercommunion would lead to organizational unity.

²⁰ Mueller to Bishop Erwin Kreuzer, Bonn, 13 May 1936, *AAU*, 14/10.

²¹ *Rola Boża*, 26 October 1940, p.341. Cf. *Rola Boża*, 26 October 1946, p.775.

²² See, e.g., *Rola Boża*, 10 May 1941, pp.153–154; 24 May 1941, pp.169–170; 7 June 1941, pp.178–180, 187–190; 21 June 1941, pp.194–196; 30 August 1941, pp.274–277; 11 October 1941, p.336; 25 October 1941, p.352; 5 December 1942, p.390; 5 May 1945, pp.140–141; 30 June 1945, pp.194–197; 14 July 1945, pp.210–216; 14 September 1946, p.648.

Notwithstanding the apparent absence of detailed prior consultation and discussion within the PNCC, its officials concluded that they had laid adequate groundwork for the approval of intercommunion. The proposal met with no noticeable opposition when it arose at the General Synod in 1946. Published accounts of the synodal deliberations noted that upon the recommendation of Bishop Hodur the delegates approved “intercommunion with the Episcopal Church” by acclamation.²³ Most PNCC officials then and since have assumed that this action extended at least to the Church of England as well, probably because Bishop Hodur subsequently announced that the Synod “accepted unanimously and with great enthusiasm the principle of Intercommunion between the PNC. Church of America and Poland [and] the Anglican and Episcopal Churches...”²⁴ Reports of the synodal deliberations published at the time do not, strictly speaking, support this broader interpretation. Nor do these reports expressly state that the Synod accepted or approved the Bonn Agreement. Moreover, the explanations of intercommunion offered in the PNCC press adopted a rather narrow interpretation of the arrangement that reflected concern about preserving the church’s independence. According to these explanations, intercommunion was a means by which the PNCC “entered into friendly relations with the two historic [and] strong churches of the English and American nations”. The agreement meant no more than a mutual recognition of each other’s sacraments, and the PNCC retained full autonomy on matters of “principles, administration, and liturgy...”²⁵

The elucidation and implementation of the new relationship devolved upon a joint intercommunion commission which brought together leading clergy from PECUSA and the PNCC. Technically, the representatives of each church formed separate “Committees on Intercommunion”, but the individual committees did not function independently. The joint commission faced a very complex task. The Bonn Agreement, which sanctioned *communio in sacris* based upon a mutual recognition of “catholicity and independence”, represented only a statement of broad principles. Moreover, it reflected conditions in Eu-

²³ *Rola Boża*, 2 November 1946, pp.794–795; 9 November 1946 pp. 812–813.

²⁴ *Rola Boża*, 23 November 1946, pp.838–842.

²⁵ *Rola Boża*, 9 November 1946, pp.815–816; 16 November 1946, pp. 824–825; 23 November 1946, pp.838–842.

rope, where Anglicans and Old Catholics did not coexist on the same geographic territory.

As Fr. Platt's summary of the commission's work from 1947 to 1958 suggests, the two churches accomplished a great deal.²⁶ But these achievements, which by 1958 culminated in the preparation of draft "Regulations as to Intercommunion", concealed several weaknesses. In retrospect, we can identify at least three major shortcomings: a failure to reach agreement on the ecclesiological implications of intercommunion; a reluctance to promote extensive grass-roots ecumenism; and a tendency to gloss over real or potential areas of doctrinal divergence. Most PNCC leaders regarded intercommunion as an end in itself that existed primarily to meet the pastoral needs of Polish National Catholics in diaspora. Thus, for example, the commission discouraged permanent transfers of membership and required prior approval of such actions on a case by case basis.²⁷ The Episcopal members of the commission demonstrated considerable respect for the PNCC's sensitivities, but there is some evidence that several Episcopalians still viewed intercommunion as the first stage in a movement towards greater integration. For example, Fr. Floyd W. Tomkins, the commission secretary, believed that intercommunion "is not a final solution" but rather "the basis for ultimate unity".²⁸ Bishop George N. Luxton, a Canadian prelate, embraced a similar view. He described intercommunion as an "interim" arrangement, and he expressed the

²⁶ Fr. Platt errs, however, when he states that the impetus for the extension of intercommunion to Canada came from Canadian Anglicans. Bishop Jasinski took the initiative in this regard during 1948, but the Canadians did not act until 1955. *Second Joint Meeting: Intercommunion Committees of the Polish National Catholic Church and of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A. ..., January 14, 1948* (New York: Advisory Council on Ecclesiastical Relations, n.d.), pp. 3-4 (hereafter cited *Minutes, January, 1948*). See also Bishop G. Ashton Oldham, Albany, to Archbishop George F. Kingston, Halifax, Canada, 30 April 1948; Fr. Floyd W. Tomkins, Washington, Conn., to Kingston, 28 April 1948; both in General Synod Archives (hereafter abbreviated *GSA*), Anglican Church of Canada, Toronto, File "G.S. 75-35, Polish National Catholic Church Collection".

²⁷ *Minutes, Joint Meeting of the Committees on Intercommunion of the Polish National Catholic Church and of the Protestant Episcopal Church, 27 June 1947*, p. 2; *Minutes, Seventh Joint Meeting of the Committees on Intercommunion of the Polish National Catholic Church and of the Protestant Episcopal Church, 7 June 1955*, p. 4 (hereafter cited *Minutes, 1955*).

²⁸ Tomkins to Bishop George N. Luxton, London, Ontario, Canada, 7 January 1957, *GSA*, 75-35.

hope that the PNCC “may in time move to a closer position in the Anglican Communion...”²⁹ As we shall see, the PNCC did not share these sentiments, and the failure of some Episcopal clergy to observe the commission’s norms regarding transfers would give rise to considerable discontent.

Notwithstanding the intercommunion commission’s avowed support for catechesis regarding the relationship among the rank and file of both churches, its accomplishments in this area were rather modest. Relatively few instances of joint worship involving large numbers of clergy and laity occurred, and this prevented any significant degree of interaction on the parish level.³⁰ Barriers of language and ethnicity played a role here, but some PNCC officials had reservations regarding the potential consequences of such efforts. Significantly, the commission decided in 1955 “that local contacts had better be limited for the present to the clergy”.³¹ As a result, the laity of both churches failed to develop an appreciation for intercommunion, and a genuine *koinonia* never evolved. Moreover, important doctrinal issues appear to have arisen at only three meetings and largely involved lingering questions regarding the PNCC’s Confession of Faith.³² As we shall see, differences between the two churches’ conceptions of the ordained ministry and the role of Tradition would play an important role in the termination of intercommunion.

²⁹ Luxton to Presiding Bishop Henry Knox Sherrill, New York, 21 March 1957, *GSA*, 75–35.

³⁰ Minutes, Fourth Joint Meeting of the Committees on Intercommunion of the Polish National Catholic Church and of the Protestant Episcopal Church, 20 April 1950, p.2 (hereafter cited *Minutes*, 1950); Minutes, Fifth Joint Meeting of the Committees on Intercommunion of the Polish National Catholic Church and of the Protestant Episcopal Church, 14–15 November 1951, p.3; Minutes, Eighth Joint Meeting of the Committees on Intercommunion of the Polish National Catholic Church and of the Protestant Episcopal Church, 20 November 1956, p.3; Minutes, Ninth Joint Meeting of the Committees on Intercommunion of the Polish National Catholic Church, the Protestant Episcopal Church, and the Anglican Church of Canada, 19 November 1957, p.1.

³¹ *Minutes*, 1955, p.3.

³² *Minutes*, January, 1948, pp.7–8; *Minutes*, 1950, p.5; Minutes, Tenth Joint Meeting of the Committees on Intercommunion of the Polish National Catholic Church, the Protestant Episcopal Church, and the Anglican Church of Canada, 9–10 November 1958, p.6. In 1988 the PNCC’s hierarchy, upon recommendation of its Church Doctrine Commission, formally stated that the PNCC does not subscribe to universalism as a doctrine. See *Rola Boża*, 13 August 1988, p.5.

The intercommunion commission did not reconvene until 1976, and by that time conditions in both churches had changed considerably. Mutual contacts continued at the hierarchical level, but most of these, such as reciprocal attendance at ceremonies on special occasions, assumed the characteristics of a *pro forma* exercise. Very few examples of grass-roots cooperation in worship or other forms of ministry occurred. The reasons for this hiatus in official bilateral dialogue are rather complex. On the Episcopal side, many of the leading proponents of intercommunion passed from the scene. Anglo-Catholic influence within PECUSA declined, and Episcopalians placed greater emphasis on ecumenical endeavors such as the Consultation on Church Union. Changes also took place within the PNCC, most notably an increasing emphasis on a traditional interpretation of Catholicism – rather than ethnic identity – as its *raison d'être* and a growing belief that intercommunion in some ways harmed rather than helped the PNCC. Ironically, whereas originally PECUSA suspected the PNCC of teaching heterodox views, Polish National Catholics gradually came to doubt the orthodoxy of Episcopalians.

A brief survey of statements emanating from the PNCC during the 1960s reveals clear signs of separation from PECUSA. When Bishop Thaddeus F. Zielinski, a strong advocate of good relations with PECUSA prior to 1970, discussed ecumenism at a meeting of Anglican and Old Catholic theologians at Amersfoort in 1961, he emphasized “the importance of Tradition” in ecumenical dialogue.³³ Bishop Leon Grochowski, who succeeded Bishop Hodur as the PNCC’s head in 1953, shared these views and offered a critical assessment of intercommunion at the 1967 General Synod. In many ways his critique reflected reservations voiced decades before by his predecessor. Bishop Grochowski claimed that as a result of intercommunion many Polish National Catholics, attracted by PECUSA’s wealth, had become Episcopalians without prior approval. He also averred that the PNCC’s sacramental theology was “totally different” from that of PECUSA. Thus, he concluded, intercommunion had potentially “dangerous” consequences.³⁴ Bishop Grochowski’s harsh assessment of intercommunion probably represented a minority view within the PNCC during the 1960s, but after 1970 it would gain wider currency and draw

³³ *Rola Boża*, 21 October 1961, pp. 14–16.

³⁴ *Minutes: 12th General Synod, Polish National Catholic Church* (n. p., n. d.), pp. 16–17.

increased strength from changes in Episcopal views on what most Polish National Catholics regarded as essential questions of faith and order. Nonetheless, the very fact that the PNCC's leader had spoken so bluntly in public supplied clear evidence that a breakdown of sorts in PNCC-PECUSA relations had occurred well before 1976.

The ordination of women within the Episcopal Church therefore occurred at a time when PNCC-PECUSA ties were already strained. When eleven deaconesses were ordained as priests in 1974 – contrary to PECUSA's canons – the PNCC hierarchy formally condemned the action and stated that “the ordaining of women to the Sacramental priesthood is too serious a matter to be resolved by ... unilateral action...”³⁵ However, PECUSA did not seek to discuss the question with the PNCC until late 1975, and by then an additional factor had emerged on the scene: attempts by disaffected Episcopalians to organize Anglican rite parishes in the PNCC.³⁶ This phenomenon disturbed some Episcopalian leaders, and they requested a resumption of dialogue with the PNCC.³⁷

Bishop Zielinski, who succeeded Bishop Grochowski as the PNCC's leader in 1969, proved amenable to this request. The ordination of women placed him in an extremely difficult position. He originally hoped to preserve intercommunion, but he firmly believed that the ordination of women represented an unjustified innovation which jeopardized Catholic order.³⁸ He therefore temporized, and this explains the apparent ambiguity and inconsistency in his position. When he met in January 1976 with Presiding Bishop John Maury Allin, accompanied by several clergy from both churches, the discussion centered on the questions of female clergy and an Anglican rite in the PNCC. Interestingly, Bishop Allin apparently favored the entry of Episcopalians into the PNCC; he believed that continued intercommunion could enable such people to maintain a relationship with their parent church and, perhaps, return at some future date. As of early

³⁵ *Rola Boża*, 10 August 1974, p.9.

³⁶ The first such parish entered the PNCC in 1975, and a handful of others followed. Within a few years, however, none remained under the PNCC's jurisdiction. For a discussion of this subject, see *Minutes, 16th General Synod, Polish National Catholic Church* (n.p., n.d.), pp.13–18, 127–136.

³⁷ Laurence J.Orzell, “Ecumenism and the PNCC”, *Straż* (Scranton, Pa.), 6 November 1986, p.3; 13 November 1986, p.3.

³⁸ See *Fifteenth General Synod of the Polish National Catholic Church* (n.p., n.d.), Appendix II, pp.7–9.

1976, the consensus among the leadership of both churches favored continued intercommunion, notwithstanding PECUSA's likely approval of the ordination of women, and the joint intercommunion commission was reconstituted.³⁹

When the commission met in April 1976, it endorsed the continuation of intercommunion with the stipulation that distaff clergy would not minister to Polish National Catholics. It also regarded the ordination of women as a legitimate difference in "doctrinal opinion".⁴⁰ Many Anglicans and European Old Catholics have interpreted this action as a binding commitment on the part of the PNCC. However, the commission did not enjoy such broad powers. Indeed, when it met again in June 1976 the members agreed that they could do no more than offer "opinion and direction"; final decisions, they acknowledged, rested with each church's legislative bodies.⁴¹

Unfortunately, the commission apparently did not examine in any detail the broader doctrinal questions involved. This, combined with the fact that the Polish National Catholic members did not consult beforehand with other bodies such as the PNCC's Church Doctrine Commission, led to considerable criticism of its recommendations. Several critics claimed that the maintenance of intercommunion under the terms of the Bonn Agreement would imply two things: first, that women could be validly ordained and, second, that PECUSA did, in the PNCC's view, enjoy the right to effect a major change in Holy Orders.⁴² Such a critique drew added strength from the fact that a draft version of the IBC's Declaration on distaff clergy already had been published. This document clearly ruled out the sacramental ordination of women and warned against unilateral action on the question.⁴³ Not surprisingly, Bishop Zielinski thereupon distanced himself from the commission's position and announced that it did not represent "an official Church statement".⁴⁴

³⁹ "Ecumenism and the PNCC", *Straż*, 13 November 1986, p.3; 3 September 1987, p.3.

⁴⁰ Intercommunion Commission of the PNCC: Report to the Supreme Council, 27-28 April 1976, pp.2-3, 7-8. See also *Rola Boża*, 24 April 1976, pp.12-13.

⁴¹ Minutes, Twelfth Meeting of the Polish National Catholic Church-Episcopal Church Intercommunion Commission, 1-2 June 1976, p.2.

⁴² "Ecumenism and the PNCC", *Straż*, 27 November 1986, p.3.

⁴³ *Rola Boża*, 17 January 1976, p.17.

⁴⁴ *Rola Boża*, 5 June 1976, p.14.

The intercommunion commission continued its work, but as PECUSA's General Convention approached and it became obvious that this body would approve the ordination of women, Bishop Zielinski came to doubt the wisdom of continued intercommunion. As he subsequently explained, in addition to the issue of distaff clergy, he was concerned at efforts within PECUSA to promote liberalized policies on abortion and homosexuality.⁴⁵ Two developments finally persuaded him to act. His official representative at the General Convention, Bishop Francis C. Rowinski, was refused permission to attend and address the body. Then, soon after the Convention, an Episcopal bishop announced his intention to ordain an avowed lesbian to the priesthood.⁴⁶ In early November 1976 Bishop Zielinski published the following announcement regarding PNCC-PECUSA relations: "The Relationship of Sacramental intercommunion [*sic*] between our churches is terminated until a determination is made by our General Synod".⁴⁷ He later explained that by this action he had suspended intercommunion until the Synod convened in 1978.⁴⁸ As Fr. Platt observes, Bishop Zielinski's adoption of the tautological term "sacramental intercommunion" – by which the PNCC's leader intended to imply that the suspension did not mean the end of all ecumenical contacts with PECUSA – created some confusion. However, as subsequent events would illustrate, there could be no doubt that he had suspended the relationship established in 1946.

Notwithstanding some criticism of his action, Bishop Zielinski's decision met with general approval within the PNCC. The church's Supreme Council approved the suspension.⁴⁹ The PNCC's General Clergy Conference adopted a resolution in 1978 which recommended that the Synod terminate intercommunion with Episcopalians and Canadian Anglicans because they had "disregarded the teachings of the Undivided Catholic Church embodied in Sacred Tradition and Holy Scripture..."⁵⁰ After a rather tempestuous debate, the Synod over-

⁴⁵ Prime Bishop Thaddeus F. Zielinski, "Intercommunion: A Knotty Problem" (Scranton: PNCC, 1978), pp. 6–9.

⁴⁶ "Ecumenism and the PNCC", *Straz*, 13 August 1987, p. 3.

⁴⁷ *Rola Boża*, 6 November 1976, p. 5.

⁴⁸ *Rola Boża*, 22 January 1977, p. 5.

⁴⁹ Minutes, Supreme Council Meeting, 26–27 April 1977, p. 2.

⁵⁰ *Straz*, 31 August 1978, p. 1.

whelmingly voted to terminate "sacramental intercommunion" with PECUSA and the Anglican Church of Canada.⁵¹

The PNCC's action vis-à-vis PECUSA has proved controversial and has drawn much criticism from several Anglicans and European Old Catholics. These critics have cited both doctrinal considerations and procedural issues. Some would question whether the divergence over diaconal clergy is serious enough to warrant a break in intercommunion. The PNCC's hierarchy made its position on this point clear in a statement prepared for the 1979 IBC meeting. In this document the bishops stressed that "Mutual recognition of a shared Catholicity on essential matters of faith, order and morals constitutes the foundation for the establishment and continuance of intercommunion between Churches..." Hence, "When one Church [i.e., PECUSA] unilaterally alters its teachings so as to call into question its Catholicity, the advisability – and indeed the possibility – of continued intercommunion must be examined".⁵² The 1976 IBC Declaration on the ordination of women not only expressed a negative stance on this question but also stipulated that the issue "touches the basic order and mystery of the Church".⁵³ The PNCC therefore has found itself unable to accept the validity of such ordinations and has concluded that intercommunion cannot exist in the absence of a full, mutual recognition of ministry.

Procedural objections to the termination have focussed on the fact that the PNCC acted alone and did not conform to the European Old Catholics' general preference for the retention of the relationship. This question involves the much broader and more complex topic of authority in the Utrecht Union, the nature of which lies outside the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say, however, that in the opinion of most Polish National Catholics, their Synod, which approved intercommunion in 1946, also enjoyed the right to retract this approval.⁵⁴

This view stems not from any desire to act independently but rather from the belief that local conditions will necessarily play a major role in the development of bilateral ecumenical relationships. During and after 1978 the situation in North America differed considerably from

⁵¹ *Fifteenth General Synod of the Polish National Catholic Church*, pp. 182–218.

⁵² Draft Statement of the PNCC Hierarchy for the IBC Conference, n.d.

⁵³ Quoted in *The Polish National Catholic Church in Dialogue* (Scranton: PNCC, 1986), p. 6.

⁵⁴ I examine this view at some length in my series "Ecumenism and the PNCC", *Straż*, 12 November 1987, p. 3; 19 November 1987, p. 3.

that of Europe, where geographical separation and the Church of England's refusal to admit women to the presbyterate and episcopate rendered academic the question of how distaff clergy might affect Anglican-Old Catholic intercommunion. As the PNCC's hierarchy explained in its 1979 statement, the Synod's decision represented "a legitimate exercise of our rights as a national Church..."⁵⁵ This does not mean, of course, that the PNCC believes that it – or any other member of the Utrecht Union – can enter into formal relationships with other churches in the absence of the IBC's concurrence. However, it does reflect the fact that whereas the IBC's regulations discuss the establishment of such agreements, this legislation does not explicitly and unambiguously address the termination of formal relationships.⁵⁶

Notwithstanding the absence of intercommunion, the PNCC has resumed formal dialogue with PECUSA in an effort to promote mutual understanding and to clarify, if not resolve, ongoing disagreements. Episcopalians, Canadian Anglicans, and Polish National Catholics have formed a North American Working Group, which has addressed a variety of multilateral and bilateral questions.⁵⁷ Both within the Working Group and in other fora, such as the Anglican-Old Catholic International Theological Conference, the PNCC has explained its positions and has explored areas in which it can appropriately cooperate with Anglicans. During the course of this dialogue, the PNCC has pointed out that the synodal termination of "sacramental intercommunion" meant that the relationship established in 1946 no longer exists. However, the PNCC continues to view the Bonn Agreement as a valuable expression of a goal towards which all churches should strive.⁵⁸ The PNCC also has made it clear that it does not regard the expression "full communion" as an accurate description of its former relationship with Anglicans. This stems not only from the fact that the PNCC never formally accepted the terminological change but also from a belief that "full communion" implies a greater degree of *koinonia* than actually existed between the churches.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Draft Statement of the PNCC Hierarchy for the IBC Conference, n.d.

⁵⁶ See Note 54 above.

⁵⁷ *The Polish National Catholic Church in Dialogue*, pp. 1–5.

⁵⁸ *Rola Boża*, 13 August 1988, pp. 4–5.

⁵⁹ Laurence J. Orzell, "Models of 'Communion': A Polish National Catholic Perspective", *Straż*, 3 March 1988, p. 3. The Polish National Catholic bishops' apparent consent to "full communion" with the Philippine and Iberian

It is difficult to predict the future course of PNCC-PECUSA relations. For the PNCC, the admission of women to the episcopate in PECUSA now renders Polish National Catholic–Episcopal relations even more problematic than before and would appear to preclude the restoration of intercommunion. In light of this apparent impasse, however, we might do well to move away from our historic preoccupation with the terms and conditions of intercommunion and focus instead on broader ecumenical topics. This will necessitate a careful examination of issues on which we differ as well as those on which we agree. Such a process obviously will require considerable patience and forbearance, but only in this manner can we lay a more solid foundation for future PNCC-PECUSA relations.

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churches – which the Synod did not ratify – does not represent an official acceptance of the term as a description of the PNCC's former relationship with PECUSA.