



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO POLAND

MEETING WITH THE CIVIL AUTHORITIES

*ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II**

Warsaw, 2 June 1979

*Gentlemen,
Mr First Secretary,*

1. "A Poland that is prosperous and serene is also beneficial for tranquillity and good collaboration among peoples of Europe". I take the liberty of beginning with these words pronounced by the unforgettable Paul VI in his response to the Discourse of the First Secretary, during the meeting in the Vatican on 1 December 1977 (cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 2 December 1977). I am convinced that these words constitute the best motto for my response today to his Discourse, which we have all listened to with the deepest attention. Nevertheless, in this my response, I wish first of all to express my gratitude for such kind words addressed both to the Apostolic See and to me. I add a word of thanks to the Authorities of the State of the Polish People's Republic for their kind attitude in regard to the invitation of the Polish Episcopate, which expresses the will of the Catholic society in our motherland, and which on their part have also opened to me the gates of my native land. I renew this gratitude and at the same time I extend it, keeping in mind all that of which I have become the debtor to the various bodies of the central and local Authorities, in view of their contribution to the preparation and actuation of this visit.

2. Passing along the streets of Warsaw, which are so dear to the heart of every Pole, I could not restrain my emotion in thinking of the great but also sad historic route that this city has completed in the service and also in the history of our nation. The particular links of this route constitute the Belvedere Palace and above all the royal Castle which is under reconstruction. The latter has a truly particular eloquence. In it there speak centuries of the history of the motherland, from the

time the Capital of the State was transferred from Krakow to Warsaw. Centuries particularly difficult and particularly responsible. I desire to express my joy, indeed I wish to express thanks for everything and for what the castle represents. Like almost all of Warsaw it was reduced to ruins during the Rising, and it is now being rapidly reconstructed as a symbol of the State and of the sovereignty of the motherland.

We Poles feel in a particularly deep way the fact that the *raison d'être of the State is the sovereignty of society, of the nation, of the motherland*. We have learned this during the whole course of our history, and especially through the hard trials of recent centuries. We can never forget that terrible historical lesson—the loss of the independence of Poland from the end of the eighteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth. This painful and essentially negative experience has become as it were a new forge of Polish patriotism. For us, the word "motherland" has a meaning, both for the mind and for the heart, such as the other nations of Europe and the world appear not to know, especially those nations that have not experienced, as ours has, historical wrongs, injustices and menaces. And thus the last World War and the Occupation, which Poland experienced, were still for our generation such a great shock thirty-five years ago when this war finished on all fronts. At this moment there began the new period of the history of our motherland. We cannot however forget everything that influenced the experiences of the war and of the Occupation. We cannot forget the sacrifice of the lives of so many men and women of Poland. Neither can we forget the heroism of the Polish soldier who fought on all fronts of the world "for our freedom and for yours".

We have respect for and we are grateful for every help that we received from others at that time, while we think with sadness of the disappointments that we were not spared.

3. In the telegrams and letters which the supreme State Authorities of Poland were good enough to send me, both on the occasion of the inauguration of the Pontificate and in connection with the present invitation, there repeatedly appeared the thought of peace, coexistence, and of the drawing together of the nations in the modern world. Certainly, the desire expressed in this thought has *a profound ethical meaning*. Behind which there also stands the history of Polish science, beginning with Pawel Wlodkowic. Peace and the drawing together of the peoples can be achieved only *on the principle of respect for the objective rights of the nation*, such as: the right to existence, to freedom, to be a social and political subject, and also to the formation of its own culture and civilization.

Once again I take the liberty of repeating the words of Paul VI who, in the unforgettable meeting of 1 December 1977, expressed himself in these terms: "...We shall never grow tired of striving further and always as our possibilities permit us, so that conflicts between nations may be prevented or resolved with equity, and so that there may be ensured and ameliorated the indispensable bases for a peaceful living together among countries and continents. And not last of all, a more just world economic order; the abandonment of the arms race, which is ever more

threatening also in the nuclear sector, as a preparation for a gradual and balanced disarmament; the development of better economic, cultural and human relations among individual peoples and associated groups" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, 2 December 1977, p. 2).

In these words there is expressed the social doctrine of the Church, which always supports authentic progress and the peaceful development of humanity. Therefore, while all forms of political, economic or cultural colonialism remain in contradiction to the exigencies of the international order, it is necessary to esteem all the alliances and pacts which are based on reciprocal respect and on the recognition of the good of every nation and of every State in the system of reciprocal relations. It is important that the nations and the States uniting themselves for the aim of a voluntary collaboration and one that is in conformity with the goal find at the same time in this collaboration the increase of their own well-being and their own prosperity. It is precisely this system of international relations and such resolutions among the States that the Apostolic See hopes for in the name of the fundamental premises of justice and peace in the contemporary world.⁴ The Church wishes to serve people also in the temporal dimension of their life and existence. Given the fact that this dimension is realized through people's membership of the various communities—national and State, and therefore at the same time social, political, economic and cultural—the Church continually rediscovers her own mission in relationship to these sectors of human life and activity. This is confirmed by the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and of the recent Popes. By establishing a religious relationship with people, *the Church consolidates them in their natural social bonds*. The history of the Church in Poland has confirmed in an eminent way that the Church in our motherland has always sought, in various ways, to train sons and daughters who are of assistance to the State, good citizens, and useful and creative workers in the various spheres of social, professional and cultural life. And this derives from the fundamental mission of the Church, which everywhere and always strives to make people better, more conscious of their dignity, and more devoted in their lives to their family, social, professional and patriotic commitments. It is her mission to make people more confident, more courageous, conscious of their rights and duties, socially responsible, creative and useful. For this activity the Church does not desire privileges, but only and exclusively *what is essential for the accomplishment of her mission*. And it is this direction that orientates the activity of the Episcopate, which has now been led for more than thirty years by a man of rare quality, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Primate of Poland. In seeking, in this field, an agreement with the State Authorities, the Apostolic See is aware that, over and above reasons connected with creating the conditions for the Church's all-round activity, such an agreement corresponds to *historical reasons of the nation*, whose sons and daughters, in the vast majority, are the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church. In the light of these undoubted premises, we see such an agreement as one of the elements in the ethical and international order in Europe and the modern world, an order that flows from respect for the rights of the nation and for human rights. I therefore permit myself to express the opinion that one cannot desist from efforts and research in this direction⁵. I also permit myself to express *my happiness for all the good things* that are shared in by my fellow-countrymen, living in the motherland, of whatever nature these good things may be and whatever

be the inspiration from which they come. The thought that creates what is truly good must carry a sign of truth. This good, and every further success in the greatest abundance and in every sector of life, I wish for Poland. Gentlemen, permit me to continue to consider this good as my own, and to feel my sharing in it as deeply as if I still lived in this land and were still a citizen of this State. And with the same, or perhaps even with increased intensity by reason of distance, I shall continue to feel in my heart everything that could threaten Poland, that could hurt her, that could be to her disadvantage, that could signify stagnation or a crisis. Permit me to continue to feel, to think and to hope thus, and to pray for this. It is a son of the same motherland that is speaking to you.

Particularly near to my heart is everything in which solicitude is expressed for the good and for the consolidation of the family and for the moral health of the young generation. Gentlemen, Mr First Secretary, I desire at the end to renew once again my cordial thanks to you and to express my esteem for all your solicitude that has as its aim the common good of fellow-citizens and the adequate importance of Poland in international life. I add the expression of my regard for all of you, the distinguished representatives of the Authorities, and for each one in particular, according to the office which you exercise and according to the dignity which you hold, as also according to the important part of responsibility that is incumbent on each one of you before history and before your

conscience.

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