



# The Holy See

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## APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO POLAND

### *ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE POLISH PARLIAMENT\**

*Friday, 11 June 1999, Warsaw*

*Mr President,  
Mr President of the Diet, Mr President of the Senate,  
Mr Prime Minister,  
Members of the Judiciary,  
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,  
Representatives of the Churches and Religious Communities of Poland,  
Ladies and Gentlemen, Deputies and Senators,*

1. Please accept my heartfelt greetings and my gratitude for this invitation. I greet as well the entire Polish nation, all my dear fellow Poles.

Twenty years ago, during my first pilgrimage to the Fatherland, together with the crowds gathered in prayer in Victory Square, I invoked the Holy Spirit with the plea: "Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth, the face of this land!" (2 June 1979). Confidently imploring this renewal, we did not then know what form the changes in Poland would take. Today we know to what depths the power of God's action has reached, the power that brings freedom, healing and peace. We can thank Divine Providence for all that we have been able to achieve, thanks to a sincere opening of hearts to the grace of the Comforting Spirit. I thank the Lord of history for the changes which have taken place in Poland, for the witness of dignity and spiritual strength of all those who, in those difficult days, were one in their concern for human rights, in their sense that the life of our nation could be better, could be more human. What united them was a deep conviction concerning the dignity of every human person, created in the image and likeness of God and called to be redeemed by Christ. Today that heritage of courageous and ambitious struggle, undertaken for the greater good of the Republic of Poland, has been entrusted to you. The specific form that freedom and democracy assume in Poland depends upon you.

2. This meeting is rich in symbolic eloquence. It is the first time that the Pope has spoken before the joint Houses of the Polish Parliament, in the presence of the Government, the Judiciary and the Diplomatic Corps. In this moment one cannot but recall the long history of the Polish Diet, reaching back to the fifteenth century, and that of our forebears' glorious witness of legislative wisdom in the Constitution of 3 May 1791. In this place today, we recognize how essential in a democratic state is the role of a just legal system, the foundation of which must always and everywhere be the human person, the full truth about man, his inalienable rights and the rights of the whole community that is the nation.

I know that, after many years without national sovereignty or genuine public life, it is not easy to build a new democratic and institutional order. I wish therefore to express immediately my joy at this meeting which is taking place here, in the place where, through the formulation of laws, the enduring bases for the functioning of a democratic state and a sovereign society within it are established. I would like also to express to the Diet and the Senate the hope that man and his true good may always be at the centre of their legislative efforts, in keeping with the classic formula: *Hominum causa omne ius constitutum est*. In this year's Message for World Day of Peace, I wrote: "When the promotion of the dignity of the person is the guiding principle, and when the search for the common good is the overriding commitment, then solid and lasting foundations for building peace are laid. But when human rights are ignored or scorned, and when the pursuit of individual interests unjustly prevails over the common good, then the seeds of instability, rebellion and violence are inevitably sown" (No. 1). The preamble of the Concordat between the Apostolic See and the Republic of Poland speaks very clearly of this: "The development of a free and democratic society is based upon respect for the dignity of the human person and upon human rights".

Through the post-War period under the sway of a totalitarian system, the Church in Poland often acted in defence of the rights of man and of the nation; and still now, when democracy prevails, the Church seeks to help in setting upon solid ethical foundations the life of society and, as part of it, the legal system which regulates it. To this end, what is needed first is an education for the responsible use of freedom both individual and social, and also – if the need arises – a warning against the dangers which can come from reductive visions of the essence and calling of man and of his dignity. This is part of the evangelical mission of the Church, which thus makes her specific contribution to the task of defending democracy at its very source.

3. The place where we are invites us to a deep reflection upon the responsible use, in public life, of the gift of freedom regained and upon the need to work together for the common good. May we be helped in this reflection by recalling the heroic witness – abundant in the last two centuries – of Poland's aspiration to be a sovereign State in its own right, something which for many generations of our fellow Poles existed only in their dreams, in their family traditions and in their prayer. I am thinking above all of the times of the partitions and, with these, the struggle to regain a vanished Poland, struck from the map of Europe. The loss of the basic political structure which shapes social reality was always, especially during the last World War, so strongly felt that it led, in a

situation of mortal threat to the very biological existence of the nation, to the establishment of a clandestine Polish State, something which did not exist elsewhere in occupied Europe.

We are all conscious that this meeting today in the Parliament would not have been possible had there not been the resolute protest of Polish workers on the Baltic coast in the unforgettable August of 1980. It would not have been possible without “Solidarnosc”, which chose the way of peaceful struggle for the rights of man and of the nation. “Solidarnosc” also adopted the principle – how universally accepted then! – that “there is no freedom without solidarity”: without solidarity with others, the solidarity which overcomes all kinds of barriers of class, ideology, culture and even geography, as the memory of our Eastern neighbours could show.

The events of 1989, which set in motion the great political and social changes in Poland and Europe, were – despite the suffering, the sacrifices and the humiliations of the War and the years that followed – the result precisely of the choice of those peaceful means of struggle for a society of free citizens and for a democratic state.

We cannot be allowed to forget those events. They brought not only the long sought liberty, but also contributed decisively to the collapse of walls, which for almost half a century separated the societies and nations of our part of the continent from the free world. These historic changes are written into the history of our time as both example and instruction: in aspiring to the great goals of communal life “man, on his journey through history, must follow the path of the noblest aspirations of the human spirit” (Address at the United Nations, 5 October 1995). Man can and must choose first of all an attitude of love, of brotherhood and of solidarity, an attitude of respect for human dignity, and therefore the values which then determined the victory.

4. The memory of the moral lessons of “Solidarnosc”, and therefore of our own often tragic historical experiences as well, should today have greater influence upon the quality of the communal life of Poland, the way of being involved in politics or the manner of pursuing any public activity, especially those which are exercised as a result of an election and thus flow from trust on the part of society.

Service of the nation must be directed to the common good, which guarantees the well-being of every citizen. The Second Vatican Council spoke very clearly in this regard: “The political community...exists for the common good: this is its full justification and meaning and the source of its specific and basic right to exist. The common good embraces the sum total of all those conditions of social life which enable individuals, families and organizations to achieve complete and efficacious fulfilment” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 74). “The social order and its development must constantly yield to the good of the person, since the order of things must be subordinate to the order of persons and not the other way round.... The social order requires constant improvement: it must be founded in truth, built on justice, and enlivened by love: it should grow in freedom towards an ever more humane equilibrium” (*ibid.* 26).

Polish tradition offers many models of a life dedicated totally to the common good of our nation. Such examples of courage and humility, of fidelity to ideals and of the spirit of sacrifice released the most splendid sentiments and attitudes in many of our fellow Poles, who with selfless dedication came to the aid of the fatherland, when Poland was subjected to the most severe trials.

It is clear that concern for the common good should be the task of all citizens and should be seen in every aspect of social life. In a special way however concern for the common good is required in the field of politics. I am thinking here of those who give themselves wholly to political life, as well as of individual citizens. The exercise of political authority, whether in the community or in the institutions of the State, ought to be a generous service to man and to society, not a pursuit of gain by individuals or groups, disregarding the common good of the nation as a whole.

How can we fail to recall here the “Sermons to the Diet” of the Royal Preacher, Father Peter Skarga, and the ardent exhortation which he addressed to the senators and deputies of the First Republic: “Have in you a heart which is great and wide. Neither limit nor restrain love in your homes or your private gains. Do not lock it away in your dwellings or in your treasure-chambers. Let love pour forth from you upon the whole people, as a river flows from the high mountains upon the plains... Whoever serves his own fatherland, serves himself; because in the fatherland all his well-being is to be found” (cf. Second Sermon, *On Love of the Fatherland*).

The Church expects such an attitude, pervaded by the spirit of service of the common good, from Catholic lay people above all. “The lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in 'public life', that is, in the many and varied economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural activities, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good” (*Christifideles Laici*, 42). In union with others, they must infuse human realities with the spirit of the Gospel, in such a way as to make a specific contribution to the promotion of the common good. This is their duty in conscience deriving from their Christian vocation.

5. The challenges facing a democratic State demand the united cooperation of all people of good will who, regardless of political preference or ideology, wish to build together the common good of the fatherland. Whilst the autonomy proper to the life of a political community must be respected, it should also be borne in mind that a political community cannot be seen as independent of ethical principles. Even pluralist states cannot abandon ethical norms in public life: “Today, when many countries have seen the fall of ideologies which bound politics to a totalitarian conception of the world – Marxism being the foremost of these”, I wrote in the Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, “there is no less grave a danger that the fundamental rights of the human person will be denied and that the religious yearnings which arise in the heart of every human being will be absorbed once again into politics. This is the risk of an alliance between democracy and ethical relativism, which would remove any sure moral reference point from political and social life, and on a deeper level make the acknowledgement of truth impossible. Indeed 'if there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political activity, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power. As

history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism” (No. 101).

As we rejoice together at the positive changes taking place in Poland before our eyes, we cannot fail to recognize as well that in a free society there must also be values which guarantee the supreme good of man in his totality. Every economic change must help to build a world that is more human and more just. To Polish politicians and to all those involved in political life, I would express the hope that you not stint in your efforts to build a State which cares particularly for the family, for human life, for the education of the young, which respects the right to work, which considers the essential problems of the entire nation, and which is sensitive to the real needs of people, especially the poor and weak.

6. The events of ten years ago in Poland created an historic opportunity for the continent of Europe, having abandoned ideological barriers once and for all, to find again the path towards unity. I have spoken of this on a number of occasions, using the metaphor of the “two lungs”, with which Europe should breathe, bringing together the traditions of East and West. Instead of the expected joining of spirits, we are seeing new divisions and new conflicts. Such a situation implies for politicians, as also for people of learning and culture, and for all Christians, an urgent need for new initiatives which might serve the integration of Europe.

Making her pilgrim way down the paths of time, the Church has bound her mission to our continent more closely than to any other. The spiritual profile of Europe was formed thanks to the efforts of the great missionaries and the witness of the martyrs. It was shaped in the churches raised with great sacrifice, in the centres of contemplative life and in the humanist teaching of the universities. Called to care for the spiritual growth of man as a social being, the Church brought to European culture a unique set of values. The Church has always been convinced that “a genuine cultural policy must look to man in his totality, that is in every dimension of his person – without forgetting the ethical and religious aspects” (Message to the Director General of UNESCO on the occasion of the Conference on Cultural Policies, 24 July 1982). How impoverished European culture would have been without its Christian inspiration!

This is the reason why the Church warns against a reduced vision of Europe which would see it solely in its economic and political aspects, as she does against an uncritical attitude towards a consumerist model of life. If we wish Europe’s new unity to last, we must build on the basis of the spiritual values which were once its foundation, keeping in mind the wealth and diversity of the cultures and traditions of individual nations. This must be the great European Community of the Spirit. Here too I renew my appeal to the Old Continent: “Europe, open the doors to Christ!”

7. On the occasion of today’s meeting, I wish once more to express my appreciation of the consistent and united efforts which, from the time that sovereignty was regained, seek to find and consolidate a secure and rightful place for Poland in the Europe that is coming together in unity,

and in the world.

Poland is fully entitled to take part in the world's general process of development and progress, and especially in that of Europe. The integration of Poland with the European Union has been supported by the Holy See from the beginning. The Polish nation's historical experience and its spiritual and cultural wealth can contribute effectively to the common good of the entire human family, especially in consolidating peace and security in Europe.

8. The sixtieth anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War, which occurs this year, and the tenth anniversary of the events which we have mentioned should become the occasion for all Poles to reflect upon freedom as both a "gift" and a "task" – a freedom which requires constant effort in order to be consolidated and lived responsibly. May the magnificent testimony of love of the fatherland, of selflessness and heroism, so abundant in our history, challenge us to dedicate ourselves as one to the great goals of the nation, since "the best use of freedom is charity, which takes its concrete form in self-giving and in service" (*Redemptor Hominis*, 21).

My hope is that all here present and all my fellow Poles will cross the threshold of the third millennium with hope and confidence, with the determination to build together the civilization of love, which is based upon universal values of peace, solidarity, justice and freedom.

May the Holy Spirit never cease to sustain the great process of change, which looks to renew the face of the earth, the face of this land which is ours.

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\**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n. 25 pp.5, 11.