



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO POLAND

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II AT THE 169TH PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE POLISH EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE

Czestochowa, 5 June 1979 1. First of all, I wish to express my joy and deep emotion at our meeting today. The Polish Bishops' Conference is the community and the setting from which Christ, by his inscrutable plan, called me on 16 October 1978 to the See of Saint Peter in Rome, manifesting his will through the votes of the Sacred College, gathered in Conclave in the Sistine Chapel. As today I have the good fortune to be taking part again in the plenary assembly of the Polish Bishops' Conference at Jasna Góra, I cannot fail to express especially my feelings of *gratitude and fraternal solidarity*, which go back to the very beginning of my nomination as a bishop in 1958. I remember that the first Conference that I took part in as bishop-elect also took place at Jasna Góra, at the beginning of September. During the twenty years of my membership and participation in the work of the Polish Bishops' Conference, I have learned a great deal, both from the individual members of this episcopal community, beginning with the eminent Primate of Poland, and also from the community as such. In fact, the quality that particularly characterizes the Polish Bishops' Conference is that *unity which is the source of spiritual strength*. The Polish Episcopate, precisely through this unity, in a special way serves the Church in Poland and also the universal Church. Society is well aware of this, and has a justified and deserved confidence in the Polish Episcopate. *This confidence* is shown to the whole of the Episcopate, to all the Archbishops and Bishops in their dioceses, and especially to the Primate of Poland, of whom I wish to say here what I have already expressed several times, namely, that he is a providential man for the Church and for the motherland. This is the opinion not only of Poles but also of people belonging to the other nations of Europe and the world, who together with us thank the Lord for having given such power to man (cf. Jn 1:12). During the twenty years of my episcopal ministry, in the course of which I have been able to serve the Church in Krakow—first at the side of Archbishop Eugeniusz Baziak of blessed memory (Metropolitan of the orphaned Archdiocese of Lwow), then as the successor of the Metropolitan of Krakow, Cardinal Adam Stefan Sapieha, in the See of Saint Stanislaus—there have accumulated in my heart *great debts of gratitude*, debts which I seek to repay, as best I can, with remembrance of and prayer for the Polish Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops, living and

dead. Those who have died do not fade from my memory, especially those with whom it has been granted to me to be closest by working with them, in the range of the influence of their personalities—as in the case of the Archbishops of Krakow I have mentioned—the late Cardinal Boleslaw Kominek, Metropolitan of Wroclaw, Archbishop Anthony Baraniak, Metropolitan of Poznan, and so many magnificent and unforgettable Bishops, both Ordinaries and Auxiliaries, men full of human originality and Christian authenticity, whom the Lord has called to himself during these twenty years. I cannot fail to recall the late Cardinal Boleslaw Filipiak, who for many years of his life served the Holy See, and whom I met many times in Rome. Taking part in the work of the Polish Episcopate has enabled me *to study at close quarters the problems of the modern Church in their universal dimension*. This has occurred thanks in particular to the Council, in which I had the good fortune to take part from the first day to the last. In entering into all this vast combination of problems, which Vatican II pin-pointed in all its documents, I have been able to realize what a special and responsible place Poland, and especially the Church in Poland, has on the great *map of the modern world*, that world to which we are all sent, as the Apostles were sent at the moment of Christ's Ascension, with the words: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). This realization became even deeper *during the year following the Council*, thanks especially to work in the Synod of Bishops, in the Congregations of the Apostolic See, and thanks also to my meetings with representatives of the various Episcopates, both from Europe and from the other continents. One of the opportunities consisted in the visits to emigré Poles which I made several times in the name of the Polish Episcopate. Today I remember all this with gratitude. My membership of the Polish Episcopal Conference and my many-sided participation in its work *has been confirmed by Providence as the most appropriate means of preparation* for that ministry which since 16 October I have had to exercise vis-à-vis the whole universal Church. I wish to say this at the beginning of my address, which is being given to this unusual plenary meeting of the Polish Episcopal Conference taking place here today.² In the Church in my motherland, the year 1979 is *the year of Saint Stanislaus*. Nine hundred years have passed since his death at the hands of King Boleslaw the Bold at Skalka. The death of the Bishop who proclaimed to everyone—not excluding the King—the truth of the faith and of Christian morality had a significance of special witness to the Gospel and to Christ himself. Stanislaus of Szczepanow suffered death in such manner that, in the Church's tradition, he was included among the martyrs. At the beginning of our history, in the second century of Christianity in Poland, that martyr Bishop, blood of the blood and bone of the bone of the nation, was linked with another Bishop, one who belonged to the first missionary generation and the time of the Baptism—Saint Wojciech (Adalbert), who was of Czech origin. I mention him because, in the memory of the People of God on Polish soil, these two figures are linked together and surrounded by a special veneration and devotion. Stanislaus of Szczepanow was bishop of Krakow and a member of the Polish Episcopate at that time, and therefore the present Polish Episcopate has particular reasons for surrounding his figure with special veneration, and especially the anniversary of his martyrdom. This has been taking place in the Archdiocese of Krakow since 1972, while in the Diocese of Tarnow, where Szczepanow, the Saint's birthplace, is situated, they are celebrating the "Year of Saint Stanislaus". As Bishop and pastor of the See of Krakow, Saint Stanislaus was *one of the pillars of that*

hierarchical order which was established in the lands of the Piasts from the year 1000. We have special reasons for continually thanking God for the solid foundations of that order, instituted during the Congress of Gniezno upon the foundation of the apostolic mission of Saint Wojciech and his martyrdom. It was precisely to that martyred body, which Boleslaw the Bold translated with veneration to Gniezno, that the legates of Pope Sylvester II and the Emperor Otto III came. The Poland of the Piasts, which from as early as 968 *cepit habere episcopum* at Poznan—relatively early, because it was scarcely thirty-four years after the baptism of Mieszko—gained its own *ecclesiastical organization*: the metropolitan see at Gniezno with episcopal sees at Krakow, Wroclaw and Kolobrzeg. These facts are known by everyone. But it is impossible to fail to recall them and to refer to them on this extraordinary occasion that we are experiencing together. The hierarchical order is a constitutive element of Christ's Church, as the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, authoritatively reminded us. The Church which as the People of God has been built-up upon the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption, and which is continually born from the descent of the Holy Spirit, is the visible reality of *a clearly defined hierarchical order*. This order determines the Church as a well defined 'community and society, which through its own hierarchical order forms part of the history of humanity, in the history of the individual peoples and nations. Therefore we rightly venerate Saint Wojciech as the patron of the hierarchical order in our motherland. We rightly recall and appreciate the great leaders of the Assembly of Gniezno. Through the formal hierarchical structure that she gained in Poland at that time, the Church firmly became part of the nation's history. The year 1000 is a date that with good reason we link to the date of the Baptism that took place in 966. Knowledge of the history of Poland will tell us still more: not only was the hierarchical order of the Church decisively inserted into the history of the nation in 1000, but also *the history of the nation was in a providential manner rooted in the structure of the Church in Poland*, a structure that we owe to the Assembly of Gniezno. This affirmation finds its confirmation in the various periods of the history of Poland, and particularly in the most difficult periods. When national and state structures were lacking, society, for the most part Catholic, found support in the hierarchical order of the Church. And this helped society to overcome the times of the partition of the country and the times of occupation; it helped society to maintain, and even to deepen its understanding of, the awareness of, its own identity. Perhaps certain people from other countries may consider this situation "untypical", but for Poles it has an unmistakable eloquence. It is simply a part of the truth of the history of our own motherland. *The Episcopate of modern Poland* is in a special way the *heir and representative* of this truth. There is a deep reason for the fact that for a thousand years of history the heritage of the holy martyr bishops Wojciech and Stanislaus has permeated the thoughts and the hearts of the Poles.³ When in the year 1000 there arose in Poland the fundamental structure of the hierarchical order of the Church, it arose, right from the beginning, *in the unity of the hierarchy with the order of the universal Church*—that is to say with the Apostolic See. In this relationship the structure of the Church has lasted uninterruptedly in our motherland up till today. Thanks to this, Poland is Catholic and "ever, faithful". The unity of the hierarchical structure, the bond between the Polish Episcopate and the See of Peter, constitutes the basis of this unity in its universal dimension. The Church in Poland, throughout the centuries, has been firmly and unshakeably rooted in that universality which is one of the marks of Christ's

Church. The Constitution *Lumen Gentium* exhaustively studied this fact under various aspects, at the same time showing how the universal dimension of the Church is linked to the mission and ministry of Peter. We are well aware that this fact that the Church in Poland is rooted in its catholicity—from the moment of the Baptism and of the Assembly of Gniezno and throughout history—has a *particular meaning for the spiritual life of the nation*. And it also has a meaning for the nation's culture, which is marked not only by the tradition of visible links with Rome but also possesses the characteristic of universality proper to Catholicism and the characteristic of openness to everything which in the universal exchange of good things becomes the portion of each of those who take part in it. This affirmation could be confirmed by innumerable instances taken from our history, One of these instances could also be the fact that we are together today, namely that the Polish Episcopate is meeting a Polish Pope. It is generally stated that the Polish people's sharing in the Church's spiritual heritage, which results from its universal unity, has become an *element of unity and security of the nation's identity and unity* in the particularly difficult periods. Those periods were also particularly marked by the spreading of the Christian spirit. This is confirmed by the nineteenth century, and for us it is confirmed by the recent decades of the present century. After the period of occupation, which as everyone knows was a terrible and mortal threat for Poland's survival, there began a period of Great transformations which found outward expression, for example, in the completely new definition, of the boundaries of the State. In this context, the bond between the life of the nation and the activity of the Church, a bond experienced for centuries, has been once more activated before our eyes. *The normalization of ecclesiastical relationships in the sphere of the new boundaries of the Polish State*, and in particular in the territories of the West and North, has clearly confirmed the meaning of the year 1000 or the times of Saints Wojciech and Stanislaus. The hierarchical order of the State has become not only the centre of her pastoral mission, but also a clear support for the whole life of society, for the nation conscious of its right to exist, which, as a nation that is in the vast majority Catholic, seeks this support also in the hierarchical structures of the Church. Such is the eloquence of the events that began in the pontificate of Pope Pius XII in 1945, shortly after the end of the War and the Occupation, with the memorable mission of Cardinal Augustyn Hlond, Primate of Poland, and concluded with the final decisions of Pope *Paul VI* in June 1972, when in the Archdiocese of Krakow there began the seven-year jubilee of the pastoral service of Saint Stanislaus. It is significant that it was precisely during the Plenary Conference in Krakow, on 28 June that these important decisions of Paul VI were made public. The Church's hierarchical order finds its keystone in the mission and ministry of Peter. The Apostolic See draws from this mission and ministry the character that is proper to it. This character is not one of secular and political structure, even though, for reasons that are still valid, there is still linked to the See of Rome a remnant of the old Papal States. However, as in the case of that State, which in its historical aspect ceased to exist in 1870, so likewise the one which actually remains of it and which is only symbolical, is a guarantee of the sovereignty of the Apostolic See in regard to the world and constitutes a basis to support what is essential for the Apostolic See. This stems solely and exclusively from the nature of the Church, from her apostolic mission, from the evangelical service to truth and love, from the pastoral mission which, above all, the hierarchical order of the Church

serves. The chapters devoted to this hierarchical order and its motivation are found in the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, after the chapters dealing with the mystery of the Church and the universal mission of the People of God. It is only if we keep before our eyes this proper and correct image of the Church, and, in its organic whole, the proper image of the Apostolic See, that we can lay down exactly the meaning of the question that for many years has been of great relevance in Poland—the *question of the normalization of relations between the Church and the State*. It is necessary to speak here about this relevance which has new aspects because the already-mentioned question has behind it, for understandable reasons, a long and complex history which cannot be ignored. The Polish Episcopate, in close collaboration with the Apostolic See, especially during the pontificate of John XXIII and of Paul VI, did a great deal for the cause of this normalization. In the first place, it laid down a series of concrete elements on which to base it. Of fundamental assistance in this pioneering work was the teaching contained in the documents of the Second Vatican Council; and especially the possibility of using the *Declaration on Religions Freedom*, a document that directly tallies with the principles promulgated in fundamental State and international documents, including the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic. It is clear that the concrete application of these principles can only respond to the idea of "religious freedom" when it takes into consideration the real needs of the Church linked with her many-sided activity. I spoke about this subject, and also of the Church's readiness to collaborate with all countries and with all people of good will, on 12 January last [to the Diplomatic Corps](#) accredited to the Holy See. Here is a relevant passage: "Maintaining contacts—among others by means of diplomatic representations—with so many and such different States, the Apostolic See wishes above all to express its deep esteem for each nation and each people, for its tradition, its culture, its progress in every field, as I said already in the letters addressed to Heads of State on the occasion of my election to the See of Peter. The State, as the expression of the sovereign self-determination of peoples and nations, is a normal realization of social order. Its moral authority consists in that. The son of a people with a millenary culture which was deprived for a considerable time of its independence as a State, I know, from experience, the deep significance of this principle. "The Apostolic See welcomes joyfully all diplomatic representatives, not only as spokesmen of their own governments, regimes and political structures, but also and above all as representatives of peoples and nations which, through these political structures, manifest their sovereignty, their political independence, and the possibility of deciding their destiny autonomously. And it does so without any prejudice as regards the numerical importance of the population: here, it is not the numerical factor that is decisive.

"The Apostolic See rejoices at the presence of so many representatives; it would likewise be happy to see many others, especially of nations and peoples which at times had a centuries-old tradition in this connection. I am thinking here particularly of the nations that can be considered Catholic, but also of others. For, at present, just as ecumenism between the Catholic Church and other Christian Churches is developing, just as there is a tendency to establish contacts with all men by appealing to good will, so this circle is widening... The Apostolic See, in conformity with

the mission of the Church, wishes to be at the centre of this brotherly rapprochement. It wishes to serve the cause of peace, not through political activity but by serving the values and principles which condition peace and rapprochement, and which are at the basis of the international common good...

"We see clearly that humanity is divided in a great many ways. It is a question also, and perhaps above all, of ideological divisions bound up with the different State systems. The search for solutions that will permit human societies to carry out their own tasks and to live in justice is perhaps the main sign of our time... Advantage must be taken of mutual experiences...

"The Apostolic See, which has already given proof of this, is always ready to manifest its openness with regard to all countries or regimes, seeking the essential good which is man's real good. A good number of exigencies connected with this good have been expressed in the "Declaration of Human Rights" and in the international Pacts which permit its concrete application" (AAS 70, 1978, pp. 170-179).

The Polish Episcopate has its own experiences in this important field. Basing itself on the teaching of Vatican II, it has worked out a series of documents of theory, which are known to the Apostolic See, and at the same time it has worked out a series of pastoral attitudes that confirm readiness for dialogue. They clearly show that *authentic dialogue* must respect the convictions of believers, ensure all the rights of citizens and also the normal conditions for the activity of the Church as a religious community to which the vast majority of Poles belong. We are aware that this dialogue cannot be easy, because it takes place between two concepts of the world which are diametrically opposed; but it must be possible and effective if the good of individuals and the nation demands it. *The Polish Episcopate must not cease to undertake* with solicitude initiatives which are important for the present-day Church. In addition, in the future there must be clarity in the *principles of procedure* which in the present situation have been worked out *within the ecclesial community*, regarding both the attitude of clergy and lay people and the status of individual institutions. Clarity of principles, as also their practical putting into effect, is a source of moral strength and also serves the process of a true normalization.

In favour of the normalization of Church-State relations in our time, the cause of fundamental human rights, including the right to religious liberty, has an undoubted significance, which under a certain aspect is fundamental and central. The normalization of Church-State relations constitutes a practical proof of respect for this right and for all its consequences in the life of the political community. Thought of in this way, normalization is also a practical manifestation of the fact that the State understands its mission to society according to the principle of subsidiarity (*principium subsidiarietatis*), namely that it *wishes to express the full sovereignty of the nation*. In relation to the Nation, with regard to its special millenary and the present connection with the Catholic Church, this last aspect takes on a particular significance.

4. Throughout this consideration, especially, in its last part, we have penetrated deeply *into the sphere of the ethical reasons* that make up the fundamental dimension of human life, also in the field of that activity that is called political. In conformity with the tradition of European thought, which goes back to the works of the greatest philosophers of antiquity and which found its full confirmation and deeper development in the Gospel and in Christianity, *political activity* also—indeed especially—finds its proper meaning in solicitude for people's good, which is a good of an ethnical nature. From here that whole so-called social teaching of the Church derives its deepest premises, a teaching that, especially in our time, beginning from the end of the nineteenth century, has been enormously enriched by all the problems of the present day. This does not mean that the Church's social teaching appeared only at the turn of the century; in fact it existed from the beginning, as a consequence of the Gospel and of the vision of man that the Gospel brought into relationships with other people, and especially in community and social life.

Saint Stanislaus is called the *patron of the moral order* in Poland. Perhaps it is precisely in him that we see most clearly how deeply the moral order penetrates—the moral order which is so fundamental for man, the *humanum*—in the structures and levels of the life of the nation as a State, in the structures and levels of political life. We can never meditate too deeply about the way in which that holy Bishop of Krakow, who suffered death at the hand of an eminent representative of the Piast dynasty, was later well received, especially in the thirteenth century, by the successors of that same dynasty, and later, after his canonization in 1253, venerated as Patron of the unity of the motherland, which by reason of dynastic divisions found itself split up. Certainly, this unusual tradition *of the cult* of Saint Stanislaus throws a special light on the events of 1079, during which the Bishop of Krakow suffered death, while King Boleslaw the Bold lost his crown and was forced to leave Poland. And even though, Gall the Anonymous, writing his chronicle some decades later, used with regard to Bishop Stanislaus the expression *traditor*, this or similar expressions are found at that time applied to various other Bishops (as for example Saint Thomas Becket in England) and even to Popes (for example Saint Gregory VII) who earned the halo of sainthood. Obviously, the episcopal ministry has sometimes exposed Bishops to the peril of losing their lives and thus of paying the price of proclaiming the truth and the divine law.

The fact that Saint Stanislaus, whom history calls "the Patron of the Poles", has been recognized by the Polish Episcopate especially as Patron of the moral order finds its motivation *in the eloquent ethical value of his life and death*, and also in the whole tradition that has expressed itself throughout the generations of the Poland of the Piasts, of the Jagellonians, and of the elected kings, down to our own times. The patronage of the moral order that we attribute to Saint Stanislaus is principally linked with the universal recognition of authority, of the moral law, that is to say of the law of God. This law places an obligation upon everyone, both subjects and rulers. It constitutes the moral norm, and is an essential criterion of man's value. Only when we begin *from* this law, namely the moral law, can *the dignity of the human person* be respected and universally recognized. Therefore, morality and law are the fundamental conditions for social order. Upon the law are built States and nations, and without it they perish.

The Polish Episcopate, with a deep sense of responsibility for the nation's destiny, always points out, in its pastoral programmes, the sum of *threats of a moral nature* which the man of our time, the man of modern civilization, fights against. These threats relate both to personal life and to life in society, and they weigh especially heavily upon the family and upon the education of the young. Married people, the family nuclei, must be defended from sin, from grave sin against nascent life. In fact it is well known that the circumstances of that sin weigh upon the morality of society, and its consequences menace the future of the nation. And then one must defend people from the sins of immorality and alcoholic abuse, because these sins bear within them the lowering of human dignity, and have incalculable consequences in the life of society. Watchfulness is always needed, human consciences must always be kept alert, warnings must always be given in the face of violation of moral principles, people must be urged to carry out the commandment of charity, for inner insensitivity easily takes root in human hearts.

This is the eternal problem that has not only not lost its relevance in our times but has become even more clear and obvious. The Church needs a hierarchical order if she is to serve people and society effectively in the field of the moral order. Saint Stanislaus is the expression, symbol and patron of this order. Given that the moral order is at the basis of human culture, the national tradition, rightly sees Stanislaus' place at the *basis of Polish culture*. The Polish Episcopate must add to its present mission and ministry a particular solicitude for the whole Polish cultural heritage, of which we know to what degree it is permeated by the light of Christianity. It is, also well known that it is precisely culture that is the first and fundamental proof of the nation's identity. The mission of the Polish Episcopate, inasmuch as it is the continuation of the mission of Saint Stanislaus, is in a certain manner marked by his historical charism—and therefore remains in this field clear and irreplaceable.

5. It is hard to think of our great Jubilee of the nine hundredth anniversary of the death of Saint Stanislaus and to prescind from the European context. Just as it is hard to think of and live the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland without referring to that context. Today, that context has widened beyond Europe, especially because the sons and daughters of so many European nations—including the Poles—have populated and formed the life of society in other continents. Yet there the *European context* is undoubtedly *at the very basis*. The already mentioned analogies of the cause of Saint Stanislaus with those of other nations and States, of the same historical period, clearly show how the Poland of the eleventh century formed part of Europe and shared in its problems, both in the life of the Church and in the life of the political communities of that time. And so it is that we are rightly living the Jubilee of Saint Stanislaus, a Jubilee that has above all a Polish and native dimension, in the European context. We cannot do otherwise. Therefore, the presence of the Representatives of the many European Episcopal Conferences who have come here for the occasion is highly valued and eloquent.

It providentially happened that on 18 May of this year I took part in the celebration of the thirty-fifth anniversary of the battle of *Monte Cassino* and the victory won there, a victory to which my fellow-

countrymen contributed in great measure. On the same Monte Cassino we paid tribute to *Saint Benedict*, with reference to the coming 1500th anniversary of his birth—that Saint Benedict who was proclaimed Patron of Europe by Paul VI.

If I may allow myself to make this reference on today's occasion, I do so in relation to the European context of Saint Stanislaus and also of his Jubilee that we are celebrating. Europe, which during its history has been several times divided, Europe, which towards the end of the first half of the present century was tragically divided by the horrible World War, Europe, which despite its present and long-lasting divisions of regimes, ideologies and economical and political systems, cannot cease to seek its *fundamental unity*, must turn to Christianity. Despite the different traditions that exist in the territory of Europe between its Eastern part and its Western part, there lives in each of them the same Christianity, which takes its origins from the same Christ, which accepts the same Word of God, which is linked with the same Twelve Apostles. Precisely this lies at the roots of the History of Europe. This forms its spiritual genealogy.

This is confirmed by the eloquence of the present Jubilee of Saint Stanislaus, Patron of Poland, in which the first Polish Pope, the first Slav Pope in the history of the Church and of Europe, has the good fortune to be taking part. Christianity must commit itself anew to the formation of the spiritual unity of Europe. Economic and political reasons alone cannot do it. We must go deeper: to ethical reasons. The Polish Episcopate, all the Episcopates and Churches in Europe, have here *a great task to perform*. In the face of these many-sided tasks, the Apostolic See is aware of its own tasks in conformity with the character and ministry of Peter. When Christ said: "Strengthen your brethren" (Lk 22:32) he meant by this: "Serve their unity".

© Copyright 1979 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

©Copyright - Libreria Editrice Vaticana