



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO POLAND (June 1-9, 1991)

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS\***

*Saturday, 8 June 1991*

1. It gives me great pleasure to welcome the representatives of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to Warsaw to the headquarters of the Apostolic Nunciature. This mission is among the oldest in Europe: indeed it was founded in 1555, when Nuncio Luigi Lippomano came to Poland. After that time, the Nunciature remained here until 1796 when, after the Third Partition of Poland, the last representative of the Holy See was forced to leave the country. One hundred and twenty-two years later, after independence was regained in May 1918, representation of the Holy See was re-established under the auspices of Archbishop Achille Ratti who was later to become Pope Pius XI.

After the tragedy of the Second World War, and the subsequent unilateral renunciation of the 1925 Concordat, the Nuncio once again took leave of Poland for several decades. For Polish society this absence was humiliating and painful as it was brought about against the will of the nation by the totalitarianism that was imposed on Poland, by a regime that was hostile to the Church.

Full diplomatic relations were not re-established until two years ago, on 17 July 1989, following the political changes which took place in Poland. The presence of a Representative of the Apostolic See in Warsaw is a sign of the State's regained sovereignty, based upon the full respect of the rights of the society living within it. A similar situation has recently arisen in several other states in this region of Europe, states which have also re-established diplomatic relations with the Apostolic See after regaining full independence.

And so it is, ladies and gentlemen, that I can meet with you here for the first time, at the Nunciature, during my fourth pilgrimage to my homeland. I take this opportunity to ask you to pass on, to the governments and nations you represent in Warsaw, the expression of my profound

respect and the warm greetings I wish to send them.

2. Within the context of the awareness that the Church has of her mission today, efforts made to ensure that the rights of each and every nation and society are recognised are of particular importance. This can be clearly seen from the fact that my present meeting with the members of the Diplomatic Corps is being held in one of the countries which, during the year 1989, in some way became steps on a long road towards freedom. This calls us to reflect upon the road we have already covered. Because of her mission of evangelization, the Church has taken up the defence of the rights of each and every person and every human society, rights that are based on the human nature common to us all and on natural law rights that were confirmed by Christ in the Gospel.

In this context, it would be difficult not to stress here the specific role of the Church and Christianity in those countries and those societies whose situation has changed profoundly.

Let us not forget that, in this part of the continent, in some countries after one thousand years of presence of the Church and Christianity, the Church found herself faced with the challenge presented to her by the ideology of dialectical materialism, supported by the strength of a totalitarian state, that considered any religion as an element in the alienation of man. So it was, that the affirmation of the basic truths about man's dignity and his rights, and of the fact that man is the agent of his history and not only a "reflection of socio economic relations", was to become inseparably linked to the defence of rights belonging to each individual and to the entire national community, as supported by the Church in Poland. The Church rendered this service by performing a boldly critical role with regard to the system of social relations imposed by force, by increasing public awareness of the various threats present in public life, and also with regard to the moral duties that resulted from them within the professions national culture, religious instruction, education, and historical memory. In this part of Europe the Church often featured as the most credible institution in collective life, and religion became the single reliable source of support in a situation in which a totally discredited official system of values inspired defiance.

Several people came to symbolise the Church's approach, one that was in unison with the aspirations of society at large. I am thinking of people like Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Cardinal Josef Beran, Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac, Cardinal Jozsef Mindszenty, Cardinal Frantisek Tomasek, who is still in Prague, and others besides. Father Jerzy Popieluszko, who was brutally murdered in 1984, also became a symbol in that very same sense, and is often considered to be the spiritual guardian of the Polish labour force.

One should also appreciate and emphasise all the contributions and support that the Church herself has received, from people of good will and from present-day social movements, in her move towards greater maturity in her relations with the world. It is in this vein that I will refer to the words I pronounced, soon after the events in Central and Eastern Europe, before the members of

the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Apostolic See: "We must pay homage to the peoples who at the cost of immense sacrifice, bravely undertook (this pilgrimage)... What is admirable in the events that we have witnessed is that entire peoples have spoken their minds: women, young people and men have overcome their fear. The human person has demonstrated the boundless resources of dignity, courage, and freedom which he/she possesses. In countries where, for years, a party dictated the truth to be believed and the meaning to be given to history, these brothers and sisters proved that it is not possible to stifle the basic freedoms that give human life its meaning: freedom of thought, of conscience, of religion, of expression, and of political and cultural pluralism" (Address to the Diplomatic Corps, 13 January 1990, no. 7).

3. The walls that until recently, still separated these societies from societies in the free world and the Western part of our continent have collapsed. On their sometimes solitary path toward the truth these nations were aware of the fact that their collective history, cruelly marked by the vicissitudes of the times, make up the other part of a single European culture. With great joy the Holy See greeted the disappearance of these walls and the opening of the doors that took place. Indeed, it was never resigned to the "tragic paradox and the curse of our time", to quote the words in which Pius XII described the decisions of the Yalta Conference (Radio message, 24 December 1947). The hardest struggles of the Church and of society in the world of terror of that era occurred precisely during the years of this Pope's pontificate. Unlike the attitude taken by the vast majority of statesmen at the time, his constant demands, unequivocal in their eloquence, voiced in support of nations reduced to slavery, in support of the "Silent Church", reflected faith in the reversible nature of contemporary history and of the shape that Europe took on after Yalta.

For many years this was, within the basic confines of the Church's competence, the only form of action that could be taken in support of European "integration". During the pontificates of Popes John XXIII and Paul VI, diplomatic action by the Holy See in Central and Eastern Europe was aimed at relieving, at least in part, the tensions between the Church and communist governments. When new possibilities emerged, following a certain political *détente*, the Apostolic See became actively involved in supporting the processes that could bring the prospect of European integration closer.

The election of a Slav Pope resulted in greater solidarity and responsible support on the part of the Holy See for the Churches and peoples of Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that, especially now, when major political changes in this part of the continent are giving rise to the hope of building a "spiritual Europe", particularly with the participation and support of nations that were, until recently, subjected to slavery, the Church is particularly aware of the place she is regaining in the spiritual and human renaissance of the "old continent".

The Church wishes to be the witness of hope, but also the bold spokesman of the values and traditions that once shaped Europe and are now capable of guiding it towards unity.

"My duty is to strongly emphasise that, if the religious and Christian foundations of this continent were ever to be marginalized as far as their role in providing ethical inspiration and social effectiveness are concerned, then not only will the entire tradition of European history be denied, but a future worthy of European man - and I mean every European, whether he be a believer or a non-believer - would also be jeopardised" (Speech to the European Parliament Strasbourg, 11 October 1988, n. 11).

It is precisely for this reason that, faced with the victory now achieved by entire peoples in this part of the continent, who fervently aspire to the idea of their society's "personality" flourishing, the Church cannot renounce proclaiming the truth about the integral nature of basic human values, because, if only some of them were preserved, the foundations of the social order could be endangered. Even pluralistic states cannot renounce ethical norms in their legislation and in public life, especially since the essential gift that human life is, from the time of conception right until death through natural causes, requires protection.

In this capital of a country that, 52 years ago, became the victim of a terrible war, a war which marked the beginning of the division of Europe, and of an order maintained throughout long decades, one cannot but remind people of the truth, concerning the particularly ethical dimension of a lasting peace. As the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe quite rightly emphasised, peace does not depend only on military security, but above all on the trust between citizens of a given country and on the mutual trust between nations. This is why everything that today serves to build up and reinforce trust in a Europe that is striving for unity is of such great importance, especially as one must also be aware of that which could replace old divisions with new forms of isolationism. Alongside the basic values of social order, such as ideological neutrality, man's dignity as the source of rights, the primacy of the human person in relation to society, respect for democratically recognised legal norms, the pluralism of social structures, it is appropriate also to stress today the importance of attitudes and aspirations that seem particularly worthy of support at the very beginning of the creation of a new and more just world and of a new Europe without divisions. It is a question of formulating both in the East and in the West, a vision of Europe as a spiritual and material whole, which demands, within its very wholeness, the development and guarantees of security. We also need to know how to promote understanding at the regional level; an effort needs to be made to overcome discrimination and historical fears, to eliminate, after the period in which people lived in closed societies, the resurgence of extreme forms of nationalism and intolerance. One also needs to think about the future Europe, despite the prevalence of the political nature of events, as a continent that is culturally coherent. One should also have the ability to receive with gratitude all the initiatives and all expressions of international solidarity today that favour the task of the spiritual and economic integration of Europe.

In this task, a considerable proportion of the responsibility now falls to politicians. But the historical challenge involves all the inhabitants of the continent particularly Christians who, after the end of the Second World War, made a large contribution to the development of the civilising influence of

Western Europe.

I have limited myself above all to the problems concerning Europe, but I would like to stress emphatically what I wrote in my latest Encyclical: "Events in 1989 also happen to be as important for Third World countries, which are seeking a road toward development as they were for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe" (Centesimus annus, no. 26).

4. In the efforts deployed toward creating a new and happier Europe, you too will play an important role, you who in Poland represent the governments and nations of all continents. Even though you are, above all, here to protect the interests of your own countries, one of the privileges of your noble mission is that you have been given the opportunity to contribute to the creation of a spiritual climate of international reciprocity, solidarity and co-operation. A great deal depends on you and on the manner in which you carry out the responsibilities of your mission in this part of Europe, when trust, which is so necessary, needs to be instilled in international institutions by means of international accords and guarantees. You are expected to take part in building the bridges that are indispensable for the development of systematic relations and for the fruitful co-operation between the nations of post communist Europe which, until quite recently, were deprived of the possibility of communicating with each other in absolute freedom. Ladies and gentlemen, I hope you will harbour the conviction that by fulfilling your diplomatic mission in Poland at a time of impressive transformations in this part of the continent, you will also make some valuable personal contribution to the creation of a more human world, a world that is more worthy of man and his Creator.

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