



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF POLAND
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA VISIT"**

Saturday, 14 February 1998

Dear Brothers in the Episcopal Ministry,

1. It is now the third time in a brief period that I have the joy of meeting the Bishops of Poland. I extend my cordial greetings to Cardinal Józef Glemp, Metropolitan Archbishop of Warsaw and President of the Bishops' Conference of Poland, to the Metropolitan Archbishops of Białystok, Lublin and Warmia and to the Metropolitan of Przemyśl-Warsaw of the Byzantine Ukrainian rite. I also greet the residential Bishops of the Dioceses of Drohiczyn, Elbląg, Elk, Łomża, Łowicz, Płock, Sandomierz, Siedlce and Warsaw-Praga, the Military Ordinary and the Bishop of Wrocław-Gdańsk of the Byzantine Ukrainian rite. Lastly, I greet the Auxiliary Bishops of the above-mentioned Archdioceses and Dioceses. With you I remember in prayer Archbishop Bronisław Dąbrowski, who for many years was secretary of the Bishops' Conference of Poland and recently passed into eternity.

In a certain sense today's meeting during your visit *ad limina Apostolorum* is the continuation of that uninterrupted series of meetings with you on three other occasions and with pilgrims from all the Dioceses of Poland who come in large numbers to the Eternal City. These meetings should be seen in the perspective of time, that is, in the light of the 1,000-year tradition of our nation's close ties with the Apostolic See, ties which down the centuries have been of great importance to our country. They were established by the Baptism of Mieszko I and his court. Thanks to this event, Poland entered the cultural context of the Christian West and began to build her own future on the foundations of the Gospel. Since that time, we have become a full member of the European family of nations with all the ensuing consequences. Together with the other European nations, we are coauthors and coheirs of the rich history and culture of the continent.

In the context of the quinquennial visits *ad limina Apostolorum* of the Polish Bishops, yours takes place in the second year of immediate preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. This year is "dedicated in a particular way to the Holy Spirit and to his sanctifying presence within the community of Christ's disciples" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 44). The Polish Bishops have prepared a pastoral programme for this year, desirous that the Church in Poland should listen

to "what the Spirit says to the Churches" (Rv 2:7) and have a vivid experience of the healing breath of the Holy Spirit who renews the face of the earth down the ages and before our eyes. The implementation of this programme and of all the Church's pastoral work in view of the Great Jubilee opens our consciences to the Holy Spirit, so that we may purify them from dead works to serve the living God (cf. Heb 9:14).

2. "O most blessed Light divine, shine within these hearts" (cf. Sequence *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*). A true renewal of man and society always takes place through the renewal of consciences. The change of social, economic and political structures alone - although important - can nevertheless prove a wasted opportunity if people of conscience are not behind it. It is they, in fact, who ensure that social life as a whole is definitively constituted according to the rules of that law which man does not give himself but discovers "deep within his conscience he must obey" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 16). This voice is the inner law of freedom, which directs man towards the good and warns him to shun evil. In the long run, consenting to the violation of this law by an act of positive law often turns against one's freedom and dignity. The idolatrous cult of freedom (cf. *Veritatis splendor*, n. 54), frequently proposed to contemporary man, is basically a great danger to this inner voice. Indeed, by leading to chaos and the warping of conscience, it deprives man of the most effective self-defence against various forms of slavery.

How much we all owe to people of correct conscience - known and unknown! Regained freedom cannot be developed or defended unless there are people of correct conscience in every segment of social, economic and political life who can stand up not only to various changeable external influences and pressures, but also to all that weakens or even destroys man's freedom from within. People of conscience are spiritually free and can discern, in the light of eternal values and norms so often verified, the new tasks which Providence sets before us at the present time. Every Christian must be a person of conscience who first wins the most important, and in a sense the most difficult, of victories - the victory over self. He must be so in everything that concerns his private and public life. To form a correct conscience in the faithful, beginning with children and young people, must be a constant concern for the Church. If today Poland calls on people of conscience, the Pastors of the People of God must define more precisely the areas in which the weakness of consciences is most evident - taking into consideration the specific nature of the causes - to be able to offer their help in patiently repairing the moral fabric of the whole nation.

3. Science and culture can and must be a natural ally in the moral rebirth of Polish society. Since people of science and scientific milieus, university teachers, literary people and those in the area of cultural creativity have an experience of the specific transcendence of truth, beauty and goodness, they become the natural stewards of the mystery of God, which discloses itself to them and to which they must be faithful. This requirement of fidelity ensures that every one of them, as a scholar or an artist, "independently of his personal convictions, is called ... to function as a critical conscience regarding all that endangers humanity or diminishes it" (

Address for the 600th anniversary of the Theology Faculty of the Jagiellonian University, 8 June 1997; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 25 June 1997, p. 7). In this way "the service of thought", which can be expected of men and women of science and culture, comes into contact with what the Church is undertaking for human consciences. Consequently the Church's dialogue with men and women of science and culture is not so much a requirement of the moment as, rather, the expression of a specific alliance for the benefit of man in the name of truth, beauty and goodness, without which human life is threatened by emptiness and lack of meaning. Those who represent science and culture have

an enormous responsibility, in view of the fact that they exercise a great influence on public opinion. On them depends to a large extent whether science will serve the culture of man and his growth, or whether it will turn against man and against his dignity, or even against his life. The Church and culture need one another and must work together for the good of the consciences of present and future generations of Poles. During my [third pilgrimage to the homeland in 1987](#), at my meeting on 13 June in Holy Cross Church, Warsaw, with representatives of the creative sectors, I said that people of culture "have rediscovered to an unprecedented degree their bond with the Church". I then expressed the hope "that the Polish Church will respond fully to the trust of these men and women who sometimes come from afar, and that the Church will discover the language which will reach their hearts and their minds" (*L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 3 August 1987, p. 10). This task is still of interest, because the time has come when the bond in question is producing the expected results.

Thus, there is an urgent need to strengthen this bond with representatives of the worlds of culture and science. This is also one of the Church's important evangelizing tasks. "Evangelization" is also "the encounter of the Gospel with the culture of each epoch" (John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, p. 108). The Good News of Christ, brought to the world, transforms its mentality, in a certain sense fighting for the soul of this world. The seeds of goodness and truth found in it are purified, ennobled and brought to fulfilment by the Gospel. In addition, the Gospel inspires culture and seeks to be embodied in culture. This has been the case since the beginning of evangelization and must continue to be so because the marks the Gospel leaves in a culture are the sign of a vitality which never weakens and a strength that can move the hearts and minds of every new generations. However, we unfortunately notice that this spiritual wealth and this cultural heritage of our nation are frequently exposed to the danger of secularization and trivialization, especially in the area of the basic human, humanistic and moral values which should be defended.

The Church in Poland has a very important role to play in this area. She must ensure that the values and content of the Gospel permeate man's categories of thought, criteria of evaluation and norms of action. Our aspiration must be for all culture to be imbued with the Christian spirit. Contemporary culture has at its disposal new means of expression and new technical possibilities. The universality of these means and the power of their influence have a great impact on the mentality of society and the formation of its attitudes. Thus it is necessary to provide support for important initiatives which can attract the attention of people with artistic creativity and stimulate the promotion of their activities and the development and inspiration of their talents, in harmony with the nation's Christian identity and its praiseworthy tradition. The necessary means to cultivate all that is noble, sublime and good must not be spared. A common effort must be made to build trust between the Church and people of culture, a language must be sought for reaching their minds and hearts, to bring them into contact with the influence of Christ's paschal mystery, with that love with which Christ "loved his own to the end" (cf. Jn 13:1). The Church must also turn her attention to the lay faithful who have their own specific mission to fulfil in this area. It consists in a courageous, creative and active presence in the places where culture is created, developed and enriched. It is also a very important task to teach society and especially the young generation how properly to receive all that is the fruit of culture. "The Church recalls to mind that culture must be subordinated to the integral development of the human person, to the good of the community and of the whole of mankind. Therefore one must aim at encouraging the human spirit to develop its faculties of wonder, of understanding, of contemplation, of forming personal judgements and cultivating a religious, moral and social sense" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 59).

The question of the Church's relationship with culture and their reference to each other is a problem that always comes up in my pastoral teaching. Therefore I could not overlook it in addressing you during this visit. It is also a matter of

particular importance for our homeland. The nation, in fact, exists "through" culture and "for" culture. Thanks to its authentic culture, it becomes fully free and sovereign (cf. *Address to UNESCO*, 2 June 1980).

4. In the context of what has already been said, I would further like to stress the role of Polish culture in the unification process of the European continent. We must be careful that this process is not reduced to its purely material and economic aspects. It is therefore particularly important to safeguard, maintain and develop this precious spiritual heritage transmitted by the Christian fathers of today's Europe. I said so very clearly in my homily at Gniezno: "The goal of the authentic unity of the European continent is still distant. There will be no European unity until it is based on unity of spirit. This most profound basis of unity was brought to Europe and consolidated down the centuries by Christianity with its Gospel, with its understanding of man and with its contribution to the development of the history of peoples and nations.... For the history of Europe is a great river into which many tributaries flow, and the variety of traditions and cultures which shape it is its great treasure. The foundations of the identity of Europe are built on Christianity" ([3 June 1997](#); *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 11 June 1997, p. 4).

In this great work which lies before the continent on its way towards unification, the contribution of Catholic Poles cannot be lacking. Europe has need of a Poland that believes deeply and is culturally creative in a Christian way, conscious of the role entrusted to her by Providence. What Poland can and must offer as a service to Europe is more or less identical to the task of rebuilding spiritual communion based on fidelity to the Gospel in one's own home. Our nation, which has suffered so much in the past, especially during the Second World War, has much to offer Europe: first of all, her Christian tradition and rich, contemporary religious experience.

The Church in Poland thus faces great historical tasks, which require missionary freshness and apostolic fervour to be accomplished. She must find sufficient strength in herself to ensure that our nation effectively resists those tendencies of contemporary civilization which advocate the elimination of spiritual values in favour of unbridled consumerism, and the abandonment of traditional religious and moral values, in favour of a secular culture and ethical relativism. Polish Christian culture, the religious and national ethos, are an invaluable reservoir of the energies Europe needs today for guaranteeing the integral development of the human person within its own borders. In this field the efforts of the universal Church and of all the local Churches of Europe are interconnected. Each must contribute its own cultural heritage, tradition, experience, faith and apostolic zeal to this great task.

5. The means of social communication have an important role in the creation of culture and its transmission. In today's world, they constitute a powerful and omnipresent force. They can awaken consciences, defend human rights, direct human wisdom to goodness, freedom, justice, solidarity and peace, but "the Church also knows that man can use them in ways that are contrary to the Creator's design and damaging to himself" (*Inter mirifica*, n. 2). In them the Church particularly sees a sleeping giant of potential evangelization and is seeking ways to make the most of it in her apostolic activity. It is essential to keep in mind that the proper purpose and task of the media is the service of truth and its defence. This consists in objectively and honestly transmitting information, in avoiding manipulation of the truth and in adopting the attitude of not wanting to corrupt the truth. The service of truth is a service to the cause of the whole man, body and soul, expressed in the development of his cultural and religious needs in both the individual and social spheres. Indeed, truth is inseparably linked to goodness and beauty. Wherever the truth is passed on, the power of goodness and the splendour of beauty are also expressed and the person who experiences them acquires nobility and culture. This is a

particular mission that makes a large contribution to society's well-being and progress.

In recent years a great opportunity has been given to the Church in Poland for the work of evangelization. She should include in her range of action everyone employed in the world of the media, but also everyone who uses the means of social communication. It is necessary to concentrate not only on the professional training of personnel who can understand the specific social character, the power, the language and the technique of their activity, and who can use them for man's spiritual and material benefit. This work must also take into account the spiritual formation of those who work in the mass media. The Gospel must be brought to them; they must be introduced to Catholic social teaching, to the Church's life and activity and to the moral problems of contemporary man. With the help of persons formed in the Christian spirit, it will be much easier for the Church to reach a vast audience, the various areopagi of the world, and milieus thirsting for God. There is also an urgent need for all society, but particularly young people, to be suitably educated in the appropriate and mature use of the communications media, so that no one is a passive and uncritical consumer of the content and information he receives. Society must also be put on guard against the possible dangers - for both faith and morals and general human development - of certain magazines, books, films and radio and television programmes. It is impossible to close our eyes to the fact that the means of social communication are not only an enormous tool of information, but in a certain sense attempt to create a world of their own. Indispensable here is the common, coordinated action of the Church, schools, families and the media themselves, which can be a great help in this educational process.

In this context, it is easy to note how important it is for the Church in Poland to own and use her own means of social communication. At the present time she has at her disposal numerous radio stations for parish, diocesan and national broadcasts, as well as for local television. Vatican Radio programmes are also broadcast. It is a cause of joy that in Poland the media have become an important ally of the Church in fulfilling her saving mission. The Catholic press has a long tradition in our society and great merit for its cultural, moral and religious formation. Currently in Poland there are diocesan and national periodicals, the Polish edition of *L'Osservatore Romano* which brings us papal teaching is sent from the Vatican, the Catholic Information Agency is active, and many books are published. I also think that the Church in Poland enjoys, though as yet in a small way, the possibilities for information and evangelization offered by the Internet and multi-media publications. One task of the Church - of pastors and the lay faithful - is firmly to support the development of the Catholic press and an increase in its range of action, as well as to encourage people to read it in order to deepen their knowledge of the truths of the faith, the Church's teaching and religious culture. We must be grateful to God and to men for this great variety and wealth of media that exist in Poland. I hope that this apostolic work, which is a service to culture, truth and charity, will form Christian attitudes, engender apostolic fervour and build up the community of the Church.

6. Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, there is a further matter I would like to reflect on with you during your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*; it is the question of priestly formation. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* I wrote: "The formation of future priests, both diocesan and religious, and lifelong assiduous care for their personal sanctification in the ministry and for the constant updating of their pastoral commitment are considered by the Church one of the most demanding and important tasks for the future of the evangelization of humanity" (n. 2). Yes, concern for the formation of candidates for the priesthood, and of priests themselves - I repeat it again - is one of the most important tasks of Bishops. At the present time, the Church in Poland is facing new challenges, the effect of the profound sociocultural changes

occurring in our country. The Church's field of action has increased and, as a result, so has the need for well-trained pastors, who are responsible for the spiritual growth of the faithful entrusted to their care.

The diocesan and religious seminaries are very important for the People of God. Throughout the Church and in every part of her they are a particular proof of her vitality, in a certain sense, of her spiritual fruitfulness, which is expressed in the readiness of young men to make a total gift of themselves in the service of Christ. The local Churches' possibilities for evangelizing and missionary commitment depend on their priestly and religious vocations. The Church ceaselessly prays "the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest!" (Mt 9:38), since the question of vocations is one of her most important concerns. Everything possible must be done in the Polish Church to prevent the spirit of sacrifice and the magnanimous fervour for accepting Christ's call from being extinguished. A joint effort is indispensable for awakening vocations and for forming new generations of candidates for the priesthood. This must be done in an authentic Gospel spirit, while at the same time properly interpreting the signs of the times, to which the Second Vatican Council paid such close attention. This effort should also be accompanied by a genuine witness of life on the part of priests who are unreservedly devoted to God and to their brothers and sisters. Catechesis and the pastoral care of youth, the sacramental life and that of prayer, in addition to spiritual direction, must help the young man mature so as to make his choices of life responsibly and to be faithful and constant. I beg you, dear Brothers, to surround your seminarians with paternal care. May those to whom you have entrusted the formation of these future priests always find in you understanding, support and good advice. It seems that a new ratio fundamentalis and ratio studiorum for seminaries in Poland are necessary, adapted to the Church's current situation, to the mentality of contemporary youth and to the new challenges our future priests are facing.

In addition to formation for the priesthood, the continuing formation of both diocesan and religious priests is very important. This was broadly treated in the Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*. I advise you to take this problem to heart and be ever mindful of it, in the spirit of pastoral love and as a great responsibility for the future of the priestly ministry. May your love and concern spur you to prepare and carry out a programme of continuing spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation for priests in all its aspects. Encourage them, so that they pay great attention to their own continuing formation, which they must always pursue, that is, at every stage of their life and regardless of their condition and the functions they exercise in the Church. It is a serious, constant task whose purpose is to help priests become ever more fully and more maturely men of faith and holiness, capable of preserving within them this great gift offered to them by the imposition of hands (cf. 2 Tm 1:6), and of bearing the burden of the ministry which is inherent in the priesthood. "Today's world demands holy priests! Only a holy priest can become, in an increasingly secularized world, a resounding witness to Christ and his Gospel. And only thus can a priest become a guide for men and women and a teacher of holiness. People, especially the young, are looking for such guides. A priest can be a guide and teacher only to the extent that he becomes an authentic witness" (John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery*, ch. IX).

7. At the end of this visit *ad limina Apostolorum*, which gave me the opportunity to meet each of you personally, I would like to express my appreciation of the great, generous work of pastoral care and evangelization the Church in Poland carries out every day, undertaking the task of renewal in the light of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. I am thinking here of the Pastors of the Church in Poland, the diocesan and religious priests, the women religious, the members of institutes of consecrated life and lay Catholics. I embrace with my heart and my thoughts all their efforts and endeavours, perhaps not always fully noticed and appreciated. No one must feel forgotten, alone, or disillusioned when

faced with the difficulties and setbacks of apostolic activity. Indeed, may the prayer of the entire Church accompany them all, always and everywhere. May the Pope's prayers also accompany them all, each day!

On the threshold of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, my wish for the Church in our homeland is that, docile to the Holy Spirit, she will ceaselessly nurture an apostolic concern for the People of God and will courageously face the challenges that the new times bring. The Holy Spirit is "the soul's most welcome guest" who knows better than any other the inner mystery of every man. Only the Holy Spirit can purify the human heart from all that is unclean. It is he who heals the deepest wounds of human existence, transforming the evil within into fertile fields of grace and holiness. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the inner or "spiritual" man, made in the image of God and marked by holiness, matures and grows strong, able to "walk in newness of life" (cf. Rom 6:4), which is life according to God's commandments. Through his influence the human world is renewed from within, from inside hearts and minds (cf. *Dominum et Vivificantem*, nn. 58, 67).

I entrust you, Pastors, your faithful and all my countrymen to Mary, Mother of Jesus, "who shines forth as a sign of true hope and comfort for the pilgrim People of God" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 68). For your generous dedication to the Gospel task of serving in love and truth, I cordially bless you all: in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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