



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO POLAND

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF GNIEZNO

Gniezno, 3 June 1979

Dear People,

1. The most ancient monument of Polish literature is the "Bogurodzica" ("Mother of God"). Tradition makes its origin go back to Saint Wojciech (Adalbert). The history of literature enables us to place in the fifteenth century the date of the oldest texts of this *song message*. I call it a song message because the Bogurodzica is not only a song but also a profession of faith, a creed of Polish belief; it is a catechesis and even a document of Christian education. The principal truths of faith and the principles of morals are contained in it. It is not merely a historical object. It is a document of life. Jakub-Wujek called it "the Polish catechism".

It is always with deep emotion, with rapture, that we sing it, remembering that it was sung at solemn and decisive moments. We read it with deep feeling. It is difficult to read these ancient verses in any other way, if we think of the fact that *the generations of our forefathers were brought up on them*. The song of the Bogurodzica is not just an ancient cultural document. It has given Polish culture its fundamental original framework.

2. *Culture* is an expression of man, a confirmation of humanity. Man creates culture and through culture creates himself. He creates himself with the inward effort of the spirit, of thought, will and heart. At the same time he creates culture in communion with others. Culture is an expression of communication, of shared thought and collaboration by human beings. It is born of service of the common good and becomes an essential good of human communities.

Culture is above all *a common good of the nation*. Polish culture is a good on which the spiritual life of Poles rests. It distinguishes us as a nation. It is decisive for us throughout the course of history, more decisive even than material power. Indeed, it is more decisive than political boundaries. The Polish nation, as is well known, passed through the hard trial of the loss of its

independence for over a hundred years. And in the midst of this trial it preserved its own identity. *It remained spiritually independent because it had its own culture.* Indeed, in the period of the partitions it still greatly enriched its culture and made it deeper, since it is only by creating culture that it can keep itself in being.

3. From its beginnings Polish culture bears very clear *Christian signs*. The baptism received throughout the thousand years by the generations of our fellow-countrymen not only initiated them into the mystery of the death and Resurrection of Christ, not only made them become children of God through grace, but also had a great echo in the history of thought and in artistic creativity, poetry, music, drama, the plastic arts, painting and sculpture.

It is still so today. *Christian inspiration* continues to be the chief source of the creativity of Polish artists. Polish culture still flows with a broad stream of inspirations that have their source in the Gospel. This contributes also to *the deeply humanistic character of this culture*. It makes it so deeply and authentically human, since, as Adam Mickiewicz wrote in his *Ksiegi Narodu i Pielgrzymstwa Polskiego*, "a civilization truly worthy of man must be a Christian civilization".

In the works of Polish culture the soul of the nation is reflected. In them lives the nation's history, a history that is a continual school of solid sincere patriotism. For this reason, that same history can make demands and uphold ideals without which it is difficult for man to believe in his own dignity and educate himself.

You are hearing these words from a man who owes his own spiritual formation from the beginning to Polish culture, to its literature, its music, its plastic arts, its theatre—to Polish history, to the Polish Christian traditions, to the Polish schools, the Polish universities.

In speaking to you young people in this way, this man wishes above all to *pay the debt* that he owes this marvellous spiritual heritage that began with the Bogurodzica. At the same time, this man wishes to appear before you today with this heritage, which is the common good of all Poles and constitutes an outstanding part of European and world culture.

And he asks you:

Remain faithful to this heritage. Make it the foundation of your formation. Be nobly proud of it. Keep this heritage and multiply it; hand it on to future generations.

Come, Holy Spirit, / and from heaven direct on man / the rays of your light. / Come, Father of the poor; / come, giver of God's gifts; / come, light of men's hearts... (Pentecost Sequence).

Light of young Polish consciences, come. Strengthen in them the love from which was born the first Polish song, the Bogurodzica, a message of faith and dignity for man in our land.

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