



The Holy See

Apostolic Journey to Poland and Hungary (August 13-20, 1991)

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

Saturday, 17 August 1991

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am very pleased to welcome to the Apostolic Nunciature the Representatives of many countries and International Organizations accredited to the Republic of Hungary. The recent re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Hungary is one of the happy consequences of the developments which this country has witnessed in recent years and in which we rejoice. The very presence of the Representative of the Apostolic See, your Dean, is a sign that from now on the importance of the religious dimension will be acknowledged in Hungarian society.

We have witnessed with joy the events which have recently taken place in this central region of Europe. Together with neighbouring nations, the nation of Hungary has finally rediscovered her liberty and her full sovereignty; today she can act as a partner which enjoys the complete confidence of the international community.

We are living in a historic hour for Europe: after many years of constraint and distrust, the barriers of an unnatural partition of the continent have yielded before the real power of an authentic breakthrough of law, the rejection of injustice and a worthy recovery of freedom. We salute the courage and the foresight of a people which has demonstrated a maturity gained during the time of trial and which has revealed impressive human resources in overturning an oppressive system by peaceful activity. It can now build a better future on the foundation of its historical, cultural and spiritual tradition.

2. I wish to pay homage once again in your presence to the Christians of this country. For many long years they suffered deep injury from the public rejection of their religious communities and the forced silence of many of their Pastors. Among those Pastors I recall with emotion the noble figure of Cardinal Jozsef Mindszenty, now rehabilitated and lately placed to rest in the land which he passionately loved, among the people to whom he vowed a fidelity which won the respect of the whole world.

As the welcome shown in this country to the Bishop of Rome demonstrates, the Catholic Church is now resuming her public activity. I express my earnest hope that the Church's desire to contribute to the good of society, in accordance with her specific vocation and in cordial relations with the other ecclesial communities located here, will also be welcomed. Without demanding any privileges, the Catholic Church does need a minimum of material means in order best to carry out her mission; this is particularly necessary for the revival of religious life and for the development of undertakings of a social and charitable nature. Likewise, regular access to the media will allow Catholics the self expression befitting a significant sector of the nation. Faithful to the living source of the Gospel, they manifest a particular concern for the moral demands basic to human life, the ardour of a fraternal charity called to grow continually and a thirst for unity and peace based on mutual respect between men and women loved equally by the Creator and by Christ the Saviour.

3. The Diplomatic Corps which you compose is naturally a privileged witness of the new steps which Hungary is taking. It is also an agent of reflection, co-operation and international solidarity.

Representatives from the various nations cannot forget the strife-filled lessons of this continent's history. Europe has often been the battlefield where empires, nations and even religions have clashed. The two World Wars began in Europe, disastrous consequences of which continue to weigh heavily upon whole peoples. Through reflection we need to come to an awareness of the causes which sparked and nourished these tensions and conflicts, and to guard against concealing rivalries between selfish interests which have all too often been defended to the detriment of the rights of others. On the other hand, we need to make clearly evident the common and constructive values which are the basis of a just and lasting peace, which is itself the condition for the harmonious future of a continent now regaining its cohesion under the attentive gaze of the peoples of the whole world.

All rhetoric aside, can we not affirm that Europe is really one family, made up of a great diversity of cultures and traditions within its overall unity? Although it was not always clearly perceived, this family of nations had been deprived of a vital part of itself by the isolation of the peoples rooted in the centre of Europe who were prohibited from freely sharing in all sorts of exchanges. From this day forward, will the different countries of the continent which still bear fresh scars be able to re-establish a common life in which differences are accepted and disagreements overcome through adherence to the foundational values received in their common heritage?

The leaders of the nations of Europe are faced with pressing appeals: the recent developments have opened up a new and greater framework for much needed co-operation. It is no longer a question of the play of opposing powers; it is a question of arriving at an increasingly close co-operation in what might be called "international freedom", an extension of the freedom recovered by individuals and peoples. You are aware that the Catholic Church looks favourably upon efforts to create institutions capable of fostering the solidarity necessary, above all, between the countries of the same area of the world. I express my lively hope that progress along this path will not be halted by yielding to the temptation to turn in on oneself or by fear of losing some superiority or some advantage. On the European scale, the stakes of solidarity between nations and concern for justice for the millions of men and women who have long been placed at a disadvantage constitute extremely worthwhile reasons for undertaking an activity which would safeguard justice from selfish interests. To cite but a few examples, one hopes to see progress in regard to the movement of people from country to country, exchange of information and technology and an equitable economic co-operation, without the latter leading to any subordination.

4. Hungary, like the other countries of this region, is faced with many difficult tasks if she is to regain all her energy and her prosperity. The economy must be rebuilt in order to be capable of responding to the vital needs of the population. The educational system must be overhauled and receive sufficient funding. Culture must take possession once again of the richness of its own historical memory while at the same time benefiting from disinterested contributions from other regions. In these areas which I have merely touched upon, you, ladies and gentlemen, are the primary agents of a co-operation which one hopes will develop fruitfully and without delay.

It is not the Church's role, as you know, to intervene in areas which belong to the proper competence of states. Nevertheless I feel the need to appeal to the peoples and to their leaders never to lose sight of the profound reasons for a co-operation which cannot be defined solely in terms of markets or even of cultural exchanges. The desired assistance and instances of private or public co-operation have the purpose of allowing these peoples to return to work, to expand their talents and human resources to safeguard their natural environment to disseminate their culture and to make good use of all the possibilities of their humanity.

In other words, it is important not to erect rigid barriers between different domains. Solidarity, between individuals as well as between peoples, is above all a principle of the moral order. Human economic, political or cultural activity attains its full meaning only when a regulation of the ethical order prevails over other considerations, however legitimate they may be. In a word, the human person and the "personality" of a people must be respected and served before all else. Never can life be held in contempt. There is no real progress in the human community except when that law which is rooted in man's very nature is recognized as a foundation which is antecedent to every contract, treaty and establishment of institutional structures, within the framework of a single nation or of the solidarity of several nations.

5. The countries of the central region of Europe have begun to rebuild a world of freedom. We know that there is also a resurgence of tensions 'between groups of different nationalities present within individual political entities. On numerous occasions I have called for respect for the rights of all nations and of all minorities: the latter must accept the constitution of the country in which they live, yet governments also owe them the recognition of equal rights, including the right to use their native language, the enjoyment of a just autonomy and the preservation of their own culture. Hungarians are sensitive to the situation of their brothers and sisters who live in many neighbouring countries; they have a legitimate desire to maintain certain kinds of relations with them. If borders are inviolable, must we not likewise affirm that peoples themselves are inviolable? Between majorities and minorities, there is an urgent need to overcome prejudices or hostilities inherited from history. Through a better mutual acquaintance, could we not patiently overcome those ancient antipathies to which we cannot remain resigned? This is a priority for Christians: they may not set it aside without being unfaithful to a central truth, that of the fundamental equality of all human beings who have been called to live in fraternal unity, beyond all sorts of borders. To reach that goal, a long road must be travelled; far from discouraging us, this must encourage us to undertake the journey without delay.

6. At a time when decisive choices must be made for the future of the continent of Europe, I have wished to express to you some convictions which I consider essential. If, in Budapest today, our attention is drawn to a Europe in a state of transformation, it is quite clear that we are not overlooking the grave concerns felt by other regions of the world, regions which many of you represent. We hope that the division which until recently separated East and West will be closed in a lasting way. We likewise hope that all the partners of the international community will agree to make the unremitting efforts needed to intensify co-operation and solidarity between North and South. In its infinite diversity, the human family is one. All its members have an equal dignity. No one can allow even a single human being to be scorned and deprived of his elementary rights. Recent generations have learned, as none of their predecessors ever could, to survey our whole planet at one glance. But much remains to be learned and to be done in order to arrive at an effective solidarity between all peoples.

7. Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, at the conclusion of our meeting I am pleased to offer each of you the fervent good wishes of the Bishop of Rome for yourselves and for the peoples which you represent. In the hope of seeing the country which has welcomed us, the continent of Europe and all the nations of the world advance with firm stride and open spirit on the paths of justice and peace. I ask Almighty God to bless you and the nations which you represent with his abundant gifts of wisdom and love.

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