



# The Holy See

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***DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II  
A S.E. IL SIGNOR STEFAN FRANKIEWICZ,  
NUOVO AMBASCIATORE DI POLONIA PRESSO LA SANTA SEDE\****

*Martedì, 11 luglio 1995*

Your Excellency,

1. I wish you a cordial welcome to the Vatican and I accept with joy your Letters of Credence accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Poland to the Holy See.

I am grateful for your words, and particularly for the greeting conveyed to me from your President, Mr. Lech Walesa. Kindly convey my most fervent wishes to him for every heavenly blessing in his demanding task as head of State, with the assurance of my prayers for the whole of my homeland.

2. In 1989, historical changes took place in Poland, thanks to which the country initiated broad and radical social, political and economic changes. The effort of building a new order and a new institutional network began. One of the results of these changes was the restoration of full diplomatic relations between the Apostolic See and the Polish Republic, on 17 July 1989. The Apostolic See's representative returned to Warsaw, to serve the Church and society. Profound gratitude is due to the late ambassador, Professor Henryk Kupiszewski, who died last year, and was a worthy representative of his country and Polish culture to the Holy See.

The period of lively exchanges has continued without interruption so far. In this regard, I would like to recall President Lech Walesa's official visit to the Apostolic See on 5 February 1991, and also his private meetings with the Pontiff on various occasions, as well as the visits of Prime Ministers of the Republic of Poland and other Government representatives. Numerous Polish politicians, men of culture and of science have also visited the Vatican and the Pope's residence, and thus the

desires of many hearts have been fulfilled.

In this context, the Pope's fourth Apostolic Visit, in 1991 to a new Poland acquires particular significance. At the very start, I stated that I could hear the voice of my homeland anew: «It is a new voice. It bears witness to the Republic of a sovereign nation and society. We waited so many years for the time when this voice could sound out in its full truth, so that it might become the historical fulfilment of what had cost so many lives and so much effort...» (Arrival address at Koszalin Airport, 1 June 1991, L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 10 June 1991, p. 3). My recent brief visit to the land of my birth, to Skoczow, Bielsko-Biala and Zywiec, also took place in the context of Poland's new situation.

The Polish nation, after years of restrictions and suffering inflicted by a system of Marxist ideology, has taken in hand, with unheard of energy, dynamism and enthusiasm, the reorganization of its new image, the building of a future based on democratic principles. The Poles felt fully in charge of their homeland. The world became aware of this great effort which deserves respect and admiration.

3. The nation's tradition, which has been Christian from the earliest times, has played a decisive role in this work of renewal. Its history was always closely linked to that of the Catholic Church. Rome has always been able to rely on Poland and has never been disappointed. Christian Europe has always been able to count on Poland, «Polonia semper fidelis»: it is a glorious definition which has lost nothing of its timeliness and spiritual depth. It is only necessary that in the new reality it should recover the meaning it had in the past. In it, in fact, is the whole historical truth about the Polish nation. Thus it is essential to continue this glorious tradition, to discover new vital forces of which it is the source and the bearer. To seek solutions to the many problems of the present without a solid basis would mean to build on shifting sands and would bring more harm than benefits. Of course, the reconstruction is no easy matter, since many obstacles and difficulties must be overcome and appropriate ways and solutions sought. In addition it is necessary to take into account the dangers of the restored freedom and democracy which society has gained, but which imply so many tasks to be fully achieved. In your address, Mr. Ambassador, you stated that, as in other countries in the region, it is not easy to lay the foundations of an authentic civil society and the democratic institutions of the new State, but that Poland is mastering the arduous test of freedom.

4. True democracy can only develop on the basis of respect for freedom, together with a firm recognition of the human person's transcendent dignity. «But freedom attains its full development only by accepting the truth. In a world without truth, freedom loses its foundation.... It must be observed in this regard that if there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political activity, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power» (Centesimus annus, n. 46).

It is therefore a matter of achieving a model of development in which the moral, cultural and spiritual demands are rigorously observed, based on the dignity of the person and on the effective recognition of all his rights, especially the right to life at every stage of existence, the rights of the family, the sanctuary of life and the basic cell of society, and on the respect of the principles of justice, solidarity and equality.

Here I would like to emphasize with gratitude the efforts of all those who are committed to promoting such development in Poland, based on the demands of the order of truth and good which belong to the human being. Only God, the Supreme Good, is the basis on which a renewed society can be built so as to resolve the complex and weighty problems that threaten it (cf. *Veritatis splendor*, n. 99).

5. In Poland's new reality and in this edification of society as a common home, the Church wants to be actively present contributing to giving a satisfactory form to the democracy which is being reborn. In facing the difficulties, the ecclesial community desires to collaborate with all people of goodwill, with anyone who has at heart the true good of the homeland. Indeed, the Church «travels the same journey as all mankind and shares the same earthly lot with the world: it is to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God» (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 40). For this end too, the reorganization of the Church in Poland was established on 25 March 1992. In the Letter published on that occasion, I wrote that «the purpose of the new organization is the complete adaptation of the Church's mission – that is, evangelization in the full sense of the word – to the conditions and needs of the times in which we live and in which the coming generations of our country, of our homeland, will live» (Letter to the Church in Poland on the occasion of the ecclesiastical reorganization, 25 March 1992, *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 1 April 1992, p. 1, n. 2).

The Church does not wish and does not claim privileges for herself, nor does she covet positions in society. She wants to be *mater et magistra*, mother and teacher for the nation. She has been mother throughout its thousand-year-old history, she has unremittingly shared Poland's lot, she has been concerned for man and has defended his dignity, supporting every aspiration to freedom and independence. Today too, she continues to participate in the nation's endeavours and problems, her joys and sorrows, her fears and hopes. The ecclesial community has a vast experience of human issues, and draws on it to serve man. «The Church does not propose economic and political systems or programmes, nor does she show preference for one or the other, provided that human dignity is properly respected and promoted, and provided she herself is allowed the room she needs to exercise her ministry in the world» (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n. 41).

It would be to wrong the Church to ignore her mission or to reject or distort her teaching, which is the Christian message of truth and love. This message proclaims and fosters freedom and rejects all slavery, it firmly respects the dignity of the conscience and its free decision, and urges people to dedicate their every capacity and talent to serving God and the common good.

I hope that the Church's mission will be fully appreciated. This will be expressed by ratification of the Concordat which the Apostolic See is working on. In the process of the changes under way in Poland, the Concordat establishes an appropriate juridical framework for the regulation of Church-State relations. This international agreement is intended to encourage the building of a democratic State in Poland where the juridical, moral and social order prevail, with the harmonious coexistence and collaboration of all its citizens. The Concordat, an expression of service to society and the common good, is connected with and inspired by the nation's age-old Christian tradition, on which the Church wishes to build a better future, together with all people of goodwill.

6. In recent times, Poland has sought to enter activity into international life and the European structures. It is fully entitled to participate in the general process of progress and development of the world, and especially of Europe. The Apostolic See supports Poland's efforts to join the European Union. I also express my appreciation of every initiative Poland undertakes to foster peace and security in Europe and in the world, as well as respect for the rights of peoples and nations. The historical experience of which the Polish nation is the depositary can greatly benefit other countries, and its spiritual and cultural wealth can effectively contribute to the common good of the whole human family.

I hope that Poland will be able to assume courageously and with a spirit of responsibility the tasks which await it in this historical moment, on the threshold of the third millennium. I am confident that it will find in itself sufficient wisdom and strength to face these difficult tasks. May love of country and whatever serves to constitute its good unite the hearts and minds of all Poles.

Mr. Ambassador, I hope that your lofty mission which begins today will bring you personal satisfaction and contribute further to reinforcing relations between the Republic of Poland and the Apostolic See. May God bless you and your co-workers.

Please convey my esteem to the Government of the Republic and my best wishes for prosperity to all the sons and daughters of my beloved Poland.

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*\*L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English n. 29, p.6, 7.*

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