



The Holy See

VIAGGIO APOSTOLICO IN POLONIA **DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II**

ALLE AUTORITÀ DELLA REPUBBLICA

POPOLARE DI POLONIA* *Castello Reale di Varsavia - Lunedì, 8 giugno 1987* Today's meeting, on the occasion of my third pilgrimage to our homeland, is taking place in the Royal Castle of Warsaw. This Castle, destroyed along with the entire capital during the Second World War, was rebuilt and can continue to witness to the traditions of Poland as a State and to the history of the independent and sovereign homeland. In my thoughts I link this residence with the Royal Castle of Wawel, so as to have a more complete picture of this history over the centuries. One ought to go back even farther, to Poznan and Gniezno, the most ancient seats of the Piast. There then emerged before us the thousand year history of the Polish nation and State, of this Republic which especially from the end of the fourteenth century – gathered together two, three and even more nations. A country largely open to all, independent of ethnic, cultural and religious differences. Often there return to our minds the words of that sovereign who, during a period of great and often bloody tensions, knew that he was «not the king of human consciences and declared it publicly.² The Royal Castle of Warsaw rose from the ruins. They have disappeared, but there has not vanished from the minds of Poles - nor, for that matter, from the minds of many other European peoples - the memory of the Second World War. If in the pronouncements of statesmen, including those of the president of the State Council, the word «peace» resounds so frequently, it remains linked first of all with that war, which caused so many victims. I remember being on the soil of the concentration camp of Auschwitz in 1979, and the words I pronounced then as I stopped before the gravestones with inscriptions in nineteen languages. Each gravestone remains as it were a mute witness to the horrible slaughter. I remember noting gravestones with inscriptions in Hebrew, Russian and Polish. Those gravestones testify to the horror of the Second World War and constitute a warning!³ This warning echoes in the consciences of peoples, especially of those who in a particular way suffered the atrocities of the war, and among them the Polish nation certainly occupies one of the foremost places. If I recall it today, I do so also with the aim of emphasizing once again the great affirmation of conscience, in a certain sense common to all men, expressed in the Charter of Human Rights. This document forms almost the very basis of the United Nations, whose purpose it is to watch over the peaceful coexistence of nations and states throughout the world. The eloquence of the Charter of Human Rights is clear and universal. If you wish to preserve peace, remember man. Remember his rights, which are inalienable, because they flow from the very humanity of every person. Remember, among others, his right to religious freedom, his right to free association and to the expression of his own opinions. Remember his dignity, in which the initiatives of all human social bodies must converge: communities, societies, nations and states fully live a human life when the dignity of man, of every man, unceasingly guides the very foundations of their existences and activities. Every violation and every form of lack of respect with regard to human rights constitutes a threat to peace.⁴ It was precisely on this theme that I spoke before the Plenary Session of the United Nations on 2 October 1979, because this truth concerns peace, a basic teaching of the Church, has a key importance. Many times it

has found expression in the interventions of the Apostolic See, in a particularly, authoritative way in the Encyclical «Pacem in Terris» of Pope John XXIII. The theme of «peace on earth», so closely tied to the message of the Gospel – from its first chapters, in a certain sense (cf. Lk 2: 14) – is the object of constant warnings on the part of the Church, the object of interventions of individual episcopates, and in particular of the Apostolic See on various occasions, beginning with the first day of every year. Recently – against the back ground of the Year of Peace proclaimed by the United Nations of particular eloquence was the meeting in Assisi: the prayer for peace, to which not only all Christians, but also representatives of the non-Christian religions were invited.⁵ The last time I was in the homeland, during the difficult days of 1983, my salutation was expressed in these words: «Peace to you, Poland, my homeland». Addressing you today, in the Royal Castle of Warsaw, I have before the eyes of my soul the whole history of our homeland, so often marked by the stain of war and destruction. These historical experiences, and especially the experiences of the last war constitute for us a particular challenge to undertake the «struggle for peace» also in our nation. Can we do so in any other way than by referring to the «Charter of Human Rights»? In fact, peace between nations and in the heart of a society is always the mature fruit of social justice: *opus iustitiae pax*. Therefore one must begin with society: with men and women – with those men and women who constitute the Poland of the second half of the twentieth century. The Poland of the nineteen–sixties, seventies and eighties! If each of these human beings possesses his own personal dignity he has rights that correspond to it. In the name of this dignity, it is right that each and all seek to be not only the object of the directives of State authority and institution, but also their subject. To be a subject means to participate in the management of the public affairs of all the Polish people. The nation lives its own life authentically only when it experiences its own subjectivity in the whole life of the state; when it is aware of being the master of its own house, of participating in decisions through its – work, through its contribution. How essential it is for the life of a society that man not lose faith in his own work, that he not suffer disillusionment because of this work! This, in turn, has a fundamental importance for the whole national economy. The economy – like work – is for man, and not man for work, for the economy. Yes. Only when man is conscious of his own subjectivity, when work and the economy are ordered to him – only then is he also for work, and for the economy. Only in this way can economic progress itself be fostered. Man is always primary.⁶ I say this because the aforementioned truth is part of the Church's message in the contemporary world, part of the message of peace and justice. I speak in this way also because I am profoundly aware of the difficult period that the life of the nation and the state is passing through: difficult in a socio-economic sense. For this reason, I also wish to cite the following pertinent words of the Second Vatican Council: «One must pay tribute to those nations whose systems permit the largest possible number of the citizens to take part in public life in a climate of genuine freedom» (*Gaudium et Spes*, 31). Underlining in this context the necessity of the «decisiveness of public authority», the Council continues: «If all citizens are to feel inclined to take part in the activities of the various constituent groups of the social structure, they must find motives in these groups which will attract members and dispose them to serve their fellow men. One is entitled to think that the future of humanity is in the hands of those men who are capable of providing the generations to come with reasons for life and hope» (*ibid.*).⁷ I pray unceasingly precisely for these «reasons for life and hope» for my homeland, for the nation of which I always feel myself a son. As Bishop of Rome, I seek to carry my service to all men and all nations in this spirit; this, in fact, is the service proper to the Church. It is exercised on Polish soil by the pastors of the Church. In the spirit of these same «reasons for life and hope» I express my best wishes for all those who exercise public authority and who have, at the same time, a particular responsibility in the present phase of the history of our nation.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n. 27 pp. 10, 11. © Copyright 1987 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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