



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF POLAND TO THE HOLY SEE***

Monday, 3 December 2001

*Your Excellency,
Madam Ambassador,*

I cordially welcome you to the Vatican, and not for the first time as I have had several opportunities to do so in the past when you came here as Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland's Government and later, as a member of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. Today, however, I greet you in a special way. Indeed, you come as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Poland to the Apostolic See, to present the Letters from the President that accredit you to this office. I gladly accept them, and offer you my best wishes that your service as intermediary between Poland and the Holy See may be effective and fruitful, and give you satisfaction and joy.

I thank you for your words in which you referred to the essential elements of the current situation in our homeland, in the Church and in the world. All that can be done here is to sum them up. Indeed, the future of Poland, of the Church and of the world are inseparably and reciprocally linked, interpenetrated and conditioned. The process of social and economic transformation in Poland, which has been underway since 1989, is taking place in the context of positive changes in the world such as the formation of the European Union or the extension of the Atlantic Pact. On the other hand, the distressing wars in the Persian Gulf, the Balkans and Afghanistan, the lack of peace in the Middle East and terrifying acts of terrorism like the one perpetrated in New York, giving rise to the feeling that the stability of the political and economical order that has prevailed until now is precarious, have an enormous influence on the mindset and actions of Poles.

However, it seems that in the world's complex political situation Poland is finding its own way to

develop the State. Independently of the sequence of events in the world and despite the ups and downs, since 1989, we have seen constant progress in the process of putting our regained freedom into practice. There are obviously plenty of problems; but we cannot overlook the great achievements in the work of building a sovereign State, a State of rights and a State of prosperity, of the Governments that have succeeded one another and of society as a whole. All that we have managed to achieve in the field of political freedom, religious freedom and the democratization of social life should be emphasized here.

I follow all the news from our country carefully. I am delighted that its process of economic development is continuing smoothly. However, at the same time, I am acutely aware of the neediness of many individuals and of numerous families who turn to the Pope for aid and for spiritual and material support. Many of them are painfully affected by the phenomenon of unemployment, the lack of openings for their talents, education and energy in building a future that measures up to their needs and wishes. I am confident that the general development of public life in Poland will open for all citizens new prospects and ample opportunities to build a dignified and happy future.

I can assure you that the Church will continue to second this work in conformity with her own mission and duty.

At the presentation of his Letters of Credence of His Excellency Mr Stefan Frakiewicz on 11 July 1995, I said to him that the Church desires neither privileges nor a special place for herself. All she wants is to have the proper conditions in which to carry out her spiritual mission. Today I can say more. I can point out that in fulfilling this mission the Church is willing and able to continue the work of consolidation and formation of the spiritual, cultural and social inheritance of a nation that for 1,000 years has been linked to the values inherent in Christianity. The signing of the Concordat in 1993, and its ensuing ratification created the conditions for the Church to work actively for the good of the nation. Despite the opinion of sceptics, it has proved possible to see that this Concordat has not only helped to improve cooperation between the Church and State institutions by making more room for the freedom of individuals and of society, but that it has been a key to ecumenism, with regard to other Churches and denominational communities in Poland.

In the same spirit, the Church would also like to be present in the process of Poland's preparation for full entry into the European Union. It is right for Poland to aspire to the place it is due in the political and economic contexts of united Europe's structures. However, she should be present as a State that has its own spiritual and cultural features, its own inalienable historical tradition that has been linked to Christianity since the very dawn of history. Poland cannot deprive itself of this tradition, of its national identity. In becoming a member of the European Community, the Republic of Poland cannot lose any of its material and spiritual wealth which our ancestors defended at the price of their blood. In defending these values, the Church wants to be a partner and an ally of those who govern our country. The Church, as I said to the Polish Parliament during my last

pilgrimage to our homeland, "warns against a reduced vision of Europe which would see it solely in its economic and political aspects, as she does against an uncritical attitude towards a consumerist model of life. If we wish Europe's new unity to last, we must build on the basis of the spiritual values which were once its foundation, keeping in mind the wealth and diversity of the cultures and traditions of individual nations. This must be the great European Community of the Spirit". Here I would like to repeat once again that "the Polish nation's historical experience and its spiritual and cultural wealth can contribute effectively to the common good of the entire human family, especially in consolidating peace and security in Europe" (*Address to the Polish Parliament, Warsaw, 11 June 1999*).

Poland is still facing enormous challenges that are vital for society, today and in the future. I nourish the hope that the Church and the State, whilst preserving their autonomy and specific tasks, will set out to undertake these tasks together and in agreement. I never cease to pray God that these joint efforts may have the expected results, for every Pole and for the whole nation.

I ask you, Madam Ambassador, kindly to convey my cordial greetings to the President and Government of the Republic of Poland. In conformity with St Paul's instructions, I pray that the decisions and actions of all who are responsible for the constitutional structure of the Republic and its place on the European scene and that of the world, may be dictated by the deepest concern for its good, and that they may constantly work for this good.

Madam Ambassador, I once again express the hope that your mission as intermediary between the Republic of Poland and the Apostolic See may bring you joy and satisfaction and serve the common good of all the sons and daughters of our beloved country.

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