



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS PAUL VI
TO H.E. EDWARD GIEREK,
MEMBER OF THE COUNCIL OF STATE OF POLAND ***

Thursday, 1 December 1977

Your Excellency,

You come to us from Poland. This in itself is enough to make your visit a welcome one for us, as the name of your country conjures up within us a host of sentiments and emotions such as few other names could arouse.

Poland is, in fact, very dear to us, not only because of the personal memories which bind us to it and which, though going back to a period of our life that was not long and is now distant, are not for this reason less deep or less strong. Particularly impressed on our memory is the image of the great and beautiful Warsaw of our priestly youth. The destructive fury of war subsequently broke over it, wiping out innumerable lives and hardly leaving a stone standing upon a stone. But then the determination of the Polish people – so hard hit but not overcome by this as by other adverse vicissitudes in their long national existence – to reconstruct their city, the symbol of their unity and their decision to live, made it a point of honour, as it were, to raise it again from its ashes, so that it is almost impossible for anyone looking at it now to recognize its old wounds. This they did, not to cancel the memory, and above all the teachings, of a terrible war, but to affirm the continuity of a history rooted in the centuries and turned towards the future, which even the most overwhelming events are unable to break and which Poland intends to maintain in faithfulness to its own national identity.

And this is the other motive that makes your country so dear to us, Your Excellency. Because the history of Poland has been – from its first beginnings – deeply imbued with Christianity. And also because the Polish nation has constantly maintained the closest ties with this Apostolic See, which is, for so many reasons, grateful to it and intends, in its turn, always to manifest to it its sincere and active friendship.

Today, still, the relationship with the Catholic Church – and with the Holy See – is one of the characteristics of Polish life, as you have recalled, Your Excellency, on more than one occasion, expressing the hope that it will be more and more correct and constructive, for the good of the whole national collectivity.

We think we can serenely affirm that, in the millenary existence of your country, which has passed through such ups and downs and difficulties, the action of the Catholic Church has constantly been carried out in a positive direction, in the interest of the nation even outside the specifically religious sector, particularly in the field of culture and in the formation of the moral character of a people, which has succeeded in remaining spirited and generous even when sorely tried.

We are certain that we can give an open assurance that today, still, the Church is ready to offer Polish society its positive contribution. It has the will and the capacity, especially when it is a question of education to respect for moral values, including those that refer to social ethics and to generosity in cooperation for the common good, in work and in free personal commitment for the real and complete progress of the country.

We have been informed of the initiatives you are undertaking for the protection of the family, also promoting the construction of houses for young married couples, and of the resolutions you have manifested with regard to raising the moral level of youth. This recognition, which comes to you also from the Church in Poland, means at the same time the determination to support similar efforts, which also correspond to deep concerns of ours and of the Hierarchy of your country.

The Catholic Church does not ask for privileges for herself, but only the right to be herself and the possibility of carrying out without hindrance the action that is specifically hers, owing to her constitution and her mission. We have had the opportunity to speak more concretely of all this in the talk with Your Excellency, a talk that also offered us the occasion to proceed together to an evaluation of the problems that concern the life of peoples and to note the positive development of relations between the Holy See and Poland. In it we expressed the wish and, on our side, the will to cooperate in order that, in a climate of trustful relations between Church and State, and with the recognition of the specific tasks and mission of the Church in the contemporary reality of the country, there may be stimulated that "unity of Poles in the work of constructing the prosperity of the Polish People's Republic" which is also the wish of the episcopate.

Only in this way, moreover, will the Church be able to give more fully that collaboration which she desires to give and which is expected of her. A collaboration that will have all the greater prospects of being effective the more the other conditions are fulfilled which encourage a high moral level in society, from the education and formation of the young in State schools and institutions to the conditions of the environment of work and to the socio-economic situations of the country and its population. We hope with all our heart that the difficulties met with in this sector will be overcome rapidly and in a satisfactory way, for the good of the Polish people.

A prosperous and serene Poland is also in the interest of tranquillity and good collaboration among the peoples of Europe.

We gratefully appreciate what you said about the work carried out by the Holy See and by us personally in the service of peace, in Europe and in the world. As it corresponds to the deep conviction of a duty imposed upon us by our very mission, a duty distinct but not separated from the one incumbent upon us in the service of the Catholic Church, religious interests and the human rights of individuals and peoples, we will not tire of exerting ourself, now and always, to the best of our abilities, in order that conflicts among nations may be prevented or solved justly and in order that there may be ensured and improved the indispensable foundations for peaceful coexistence among countries and continents: not least of all, a more just world economic order, the abandonment of the race for more and more dangerous armaments, also in the nuclear sector, as preparation for a gradual and balanced disarmament; the development of better economic, cultural and human relations among peoples, individuals and associated groups.

In this perspective the Holy See has given its support and its direct contribution to the Helsinki Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and is now deeply interested that the entire final Document of the Conference – in its various parts, which constitute a wisely balanced whole, none of which can be unduly neglected – should be put into practice completely and faithfully by all the signatories. While we look at the two years and more that have passed since the signature of the Document and at the lights and shadows that the picture of its practical application presents, it seems to us no less necessary to turn eyes and effort to the future, in order that the Helsinki conclusions may develop more and more the dynamic potential that the will and the political vision of the participants incorporated in them.

We are relying a great deal on the contribution of Poland to the cause of peace and good international harmony. Placed between East and West, its vast plains have been a bloody battlefield too often. Too often – and we are thinking in particular of the last great war – its generous populations have had to suffer bitterly as a result. Oswiecim remains a symbol of this tragedy and of the aggression it unleashed. History itself seems, therefore, to guarantee that Poland will always want – as Your Excellency has solemnly confirmed to us again – to be an element of peace and a bridge of rapprochement and understanding, instead of a theatre of war.

Could we conclude, Your Excellency, with a better wish for a country and a people that are so close to our heart?

May the Lord bless Poland, in order that it may always be prosperous and happy, in faithfulness to its great traditions, which unite it no much with us, and in commitment for a future in which our good wishes accompany it.

Accept, Your Excellency, our good wishes, which we extend likewise to your wife and to all those

present with you here.

*ORa n.50 p.2, 4.

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