

The Pope's mission to save Poland

by Luba George

Pope John Paul II arrived in his native Poland on June 8. Half a million people lined the route into Warsaw from the airport, waving flags, cheering, and clapping, as he drove by. The Pope's seven-day pilgrimage, in which he is to speak in nine cities, is his third visit to Poland during his pontificate. By the end of his journey, he will have preached before audiences totaling over 10 million people.

It was already clear after the first four days of his stay, that John Paul II has embarked on a well-planned counter-offensive against the Soviet Empire. He is using his Polish trip to send an unmistakable message to the Soviet leadership that he will not compromise with Soviet moves to eradicate Catholicism in the Soviet Union, and, he will exercise the full authority and power of the Catholic Church to preserve Poland's future, as a nation that belongs historically to the

Western Augustinian cultural matrix. Each day of the Pope's visit has been designed to reactivate that "divine spark" in the Polish population which the Soviet empire is determined to extinguish.

The Pope's declarations in Poland have exhibited a degree of daring in the exercise of moral integrity and statesmanship qualities to shape and influence long-wave historical processes, qualities generally lacking in the present-day secular leaders of the Western world, as the Venice summit and the process leading to the "Munich II" zero-option agreement so miserably confirm.

Inalienable rights cited

The Pontiff pulled no punches in attacking the Gorbachov government and the Communist system. In speeches delivered in Warsaw's Royal Palace, he told the puppet Polish government and, referring to Moscow, "all those who exercise power": "If you want to conserve peace, remember man. Remember his rights, which are inalienable, because they emanate from the humanity of every person. . . . Remember, among other things, the right to religious freedom, the right to freely associate and to express one's own views." In another jab at the Soviet system, he declared: "The economy, just like work, is designed for man and not the other way around. . . . Economic progress can only be achieved in this way. Man always comes first."

These words were voiced after Polish leader, General Jaruzelski, greeted the Pope and laid down the Moscow line: "On the basis that our socialist principles are respected, the government is open to every kind of influence. . . . [However], national reconciliation will not be achieved on paper. It's a long process. . . . New forms of social life are being created. *We will not leave that road.*" (emphasis added)

Referring to the outlawed trade union, Solidarity, Jaruzelski said: "The turmoil has subsided. . . . The flames incited by foreign powers have calmed down." He said that he was well aware of the importance of the Catholic Church in Poland and that "the doctrine of the Church is linked to the solution of our problems." As the speech was being made, three prominent Solidarity figures were arrested in Lublin which the Pope was to visit the next day, following other arrests made in Warsaw.

In the Polish city of Lublin, the Pontiff denounced "totalitarian systems" and compared the 1984 murder by the Polish secret police, under KGB orders, of the Polish Catholic priest Jerzy Popieluszko, to the mass murder of Polish Catholic priests by the Nazis.

The reader should bear in mind that all these speeches are televised in Poland and the broadcasts can be received by millions of Catholics and Rome-affiliated Uniates in the Soviet Republics of Lithuania, Byelorussia, and the Ukraine.

On June 10, the entire Polish nation and millions of oppressed non-Russians in the U.S.S.R., heard the Pope in Cracow, launch a powerful polemic against Russian Chauvinism and Moscow's anti-papal policy. First, he expressed

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deep regret that he was prevented by the Soviet authorities from visiting Lithuania this year to take part in the 600th anniversary celebrations to commemorate the Christianization of Lithuania. The Pope declared—and, again bear in mind the impact this made also on the millions of Lithuanians following his speech on TV and radio—“I wanted to be in Vilnius [the capital of Lithuania] this year. I was not invited.”

In Cracow, the Pope demonstratively prayed before the grave of Queen Hedwiga, the Polish queen who in 1386 married the Lithuanian Prince Jagiello, which marriage effected the Catholic Christianization of Lithuania and the united kingdom of Poland and Lithuania. Vilnius (Wilno in Polish) is not only the capital of Lithuania, but also a city held sacred by Poles.

Then they heard the Pontiff at Tarnow beatify Karolina Kozka, a 16-year-old Polish peasant girl, who in 1914 refused to be raped by Russian soldiers and was, as a result, murdered by them.

The Pope, through use of this World War I incident, was able to convey as an “enemy image” Russian expansionism, imperialism, and oppression of subject populations. A large part of Poland was incorporated into the Russian Empire in the late 18th century under Catherine the Great, and remained a Russian possession until the First World War.

The Pontiff’s speech which commemorated the fate of Karolina Kozka, struck a chord among all Poles, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, and Byelorussians, whose losses from Russian repression total many millions during this century. Poland was partitioned in 1939 between Nazi Germany and Russia, and after the war, lost over 40% of its pre-war territory to the Soviet Union.

In another master-stroke message to the Kremlin, in defiance of Moscow’s “bury the West” policy and the myth of Moscow as the “Third and Final Rome,” the Pope ordained 50 young clerics, including three Uniates (Ukrainian Catholics). A Ukraine minority of over 500,000 resides in Eastern Poland, and most of them are members of the Ukrainian Uniate Church. Poland, in fact, is the only East bloc country which has a Uniate Church, which was liquidated in the Western Ukraine by Stalin after the Second World War.

The ordination of three Ukrainian Uniates was a clear signal to Moscow that the Pope will never accept the Soviet 1946 liquidation of the Ukrainian Uniate Church and its bloody absorption into the Russian Orthodox Church.

‘We must not yield to depression’

The Pope arrived in Poland at a time when the country is at a historical turning point. Poland has suffered enormously during this decade through the Western credit embargo and other sanctions—according to official Polish sources, these have caused losses of up to \$15 billion—which have tossed the Polish economy into the lap of the U.S.S.R. Under General Jaruzelski’s rule, the country has been afflicted by growing demoralization, impoverishment, and cultural pessimism among broad layers of the population, particularly the youth.

The situation has been aggravated by the flooding of the country with pornography, rock, and drugs.

In a country with persisting housing shortages, declining birth rates, and uninspiring career prospects, the Pope’s concern was clearly expressed when he addressed 4,000 students at the Catholic University in Lublin: “We cannot allow youth to fail to see a future for themselves in their homeland.” To save Poland from the fate Russia has in store for it and turn around the pessimism which has seeped in over the last several years, the Pope called on Polish youth to strive to build their nation.

He attacked the existence of conditions which have caused mass emigration—an emigration deliberately encouraged by the Jaruzelski regime—of Poles to the West. He told his audience to “think over many questions of social life, structures, organization of labor . . . all from the point of view of *the future of the young generation in Poland.*”

“We must not yield to depression. Neither spiritual nor social demoralization must dominate us,” the Pope told a cheering crowd of nearly 2 million people—many of whom had walked for two or three days and slept *al fresco* under hedgerows—at an open-air mass outside Tarnow in southeast Poland on June 10. His statement, which spoke of an “economic and moral crisis,” was the clearest and strongest he has made attacking the “ill-considered” farm collectivization, and—after ‘de-collectivization’—the regime’s discrimination (in credit, seed, and fertilizer allocation) against private farmers, which has resulted in food shortages in Poland, a fertile land. “Agriculture is bread. . . . Throughout the world, all agree that bread should not and must not be lacking.”

A roar of applause rose from the crowd when he voiced his support for the aims of the banned Rural Solidarity union—an agricultural counterpart to the Solidarity independent trade union representing the industrial sector of the economy; called for the independence for Polish farmers; and urging that the government honor the 1981 Rzeszow agreements—a program for agricultural reform—with farmers that created Rural Solidarity. Both Solidarity groups were banned under the martial law imposed by Jaruzelski in December 1981.

The government has prevented the Church from setting up a \$28 million fund to help private agriculture, which would have been unique in Eastern Europe.

Pope John Paul II, during his last days in Poland, will attend the closing session of the Eucharist Congress in Warsaw June 14, the official reason for the Pope’s visit to Poland. (The first Eucharist Congress to take place in Poland was in 1937 in Poznan.) It will be attended by 32 cardinals, archbishops, and bishops, including: the Primate of Hungary, Msgr. Paskai; Cardinal Meisner, Archbishop of Berlin (East Germany); and Cardinal Kuharic, Archbishop of Zagreb (Yugoslavia). Cardinal Tomasek of Czechoslovakia and the Lithuanian Archbishop (of Kaunas), Msgr. Povilonis, were prohibited by Moscow and Prague from attending the Congress.