
The Pope in Poland

The world, and Poland need 'great-hearted people'

by Elizabeth Hellenbroich

More than 10 million people, many of them youngsters, took part enthusiastically in the various masses and celebrations during the visit by Pope John Paul II to Poland, which began with a mass in Gdansk on June 5 and ended with a visit to the pilgrimage site of Czestochowa. It was from Gdansk that, 1,000 years ago, St. Adalbert (from Gnesen) began the Christianization of Poland, as well as of Hungary and Bohemia. In the spirit of this great European, the Pope took this visit as the occasion on which to present anew the fundamental ideas of the Gospels, with a view to the closing century, and the beginning of the third millennium.

Included among the stops on the Papal visit were Gdansk, Bydgoszcz, Torun, the Island of Wigry, Warsaw, Drohiczyn, Sosnowiec, Zamosc, Krakow, Gliwice, Wadowice (his birthplace), and Czestochowa, to name just a few of the places on this impressive "pilgrimage." It seems as though all of Poland were mobilized through this visit, and, in a new way, reunited, as some commentators noted.

The significance of the visit, however, is to be felt far beyond Poland. A glance at the various speeches delivered by the Pontiff, who addressed all social layers, makes clear that the Pope sees Poland as a bridge between East and West, whence a new spiritual and cultural Renaissance should begin and the foundations for an ecumenical dialogue among the churches should be built, leading to the unity of Christendom in the next century.

"God is love," was the leading idea of the trip. Love is the basis for progress of the human species and the power which shapes history. Furthermore, it is the driving force for the discoveries of new natural laws and the creation of great works of art. Love is the source of creative Reason, the Pope stressed, in a speech at the University of Torun, and it is the basis for true freedom, which—as the unrelenting efforts of the Solidarnosc movement showed—led to the collapse of the walls of communism.

Again and again, the Pope recalled the great, but also painful phases of Poland's history, especially the divisions of the country and the heroic resistance struggle against the Nazis, during which thousands were killed in concentration camps, and through torture and executions. He referred to the last thousand years of Polish history, which began with the evangelization under St. Adalbert, who is the patron saint of

the country. "Today the world and Poland need great-hearted men who serve with humility and love. . . . It is not possible to build the future without reference to the source of love which is God," the Pope told the Polish Sejm (parliament).

A Christian economic policy

A "civilization of love" means that society must care above all for the poor and the weak. An economic development must be introduced, which respects the dignity of man, as made in the image and likeness of God.

For the first time, the Pope addressed the Polish Sejm in Warsaw, on June 11. With reference to the history of this Parliament, which reaches back to the 15th century, as well as to the spirit of the May 1791 Constitution, the Pope said that a just state and a just economic order must be based on the "inalienable rights of man." "In this place today, we recognize how essential in a democratic state is the role of a just legal system, the foundation of which must always and everywhere be the human person, the full truth about man, his inalienable rights and the rights of the whole community that is this nation," the pope said.

Only a policy which places the idea of the "general welfare," the "*bonum commune*," at its center, can be in a position to create the foundations for justice and peace and to meet the challenges of the future. Against the backdrop of the heated debate which has been conducted in Poland over the last weeks and months, on the situation of farmers, steel workers, the reform of the health care and pension systems, and the policy of the International Monetary Fund, which Finance Minister Leszek Balcerowicz clings to, the words of the Pope ring out a clear warning: "When human rights are ignored or scorned, and when the pursuit of individual interests unjustly prevails over the common good, then the seeds of instability, rebellion, and violence are inevitably sown."

Only a policy which puts the sovereign nation in the center of the idea of the "common good" is able to create economic justice, freedom and peace. The Pope warned against the dangers of "ethical reductionism" in respect to the question of human dignity and freedom, which, in the past, very often resulted in totalitarianism. He called upon the government and the Parliament to educate themselves so as to construct a state which cares particularly for the family, for human life,

for the education of the young, which respects the right to work, which considers the essential problems of the entire nation and which is sensitive to the real needs of the people, especially the poor and the weak. "It is in this spirit that the new Europe should be built. 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." The Polish nation's historical experience and its spiritual and cultural wealth, he said, can contribute effectively to the common good of the entire human family, especially in consolidating peace and security in Europe.

In the city of Sosnowiec, the Pope again took up the need for a just economic order, when he reflected on the concept of work. Due to the unbridled free market, human rights are forgotten and violated. This is the case, he said, especially when people lose their jobs in the name of "economic profit," and thus lose any hope of supporting their families, or have to sacrifice their health and social security.

Unity of faith and reason

In Torun, where the astronomer Copernicus worked, the Pope presented the significance of the principles which he had laid out in his encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*—the necessary unity of faith and reason. Every time that this unity has been denied, he said, the result has been dangerous error, and divisions. The leading idea, "God is love," is reflected in man's search for Truth. Without love, there are no creative ideas, but only despair. "Man's research and work requires this leading idea. This idea of creative love is what unifies in one direction the efforts of scholars, the research of historians, the creativity of artists and the discoveries of scientists," the Pope emphasized.

During a visit to the library at the University of Warsaw, while addressing the Minister of Education, the university professors and members of the Academy of Sciences, the Pope spoke about the significance of culture and education. "A library is an institution which by its very existence bears witness to the development of culture," the Pope said. "It comprises the treasury of written works, in which we see displayed human creativity, human intelligence, knowledge of the world and human beings." With its collection of old manuscripts as well as new books and periodicals, such a collection "becomes an eloquent sign of unity of successive generations, forging from a variety of times and arguments a common heritage of culture and learning. A library, therefore, is a special temple of the creativity of the human spirit which reflects the divine Breath which attended the work of the creation of the world and of man. To understand why the Pope is here in this building and why this blessing ceremony is taking place, one must go back precisely to that moment when God made man in his image and likeness, and called him to share in the work of creating goodness and beauty."

A special concern of the Pope during this trip, was the idea

of the ecumenical dialogue among the Christian churches, especially between the Eastern and Western churches. The ecumenical mass celebrated in the diocese of Drohiczyn, which lies on the border with Belarus, was therefore a special event. The mass was celebrated in the presence of representatives of the Polish ecumenical council, representatives of the Orthodox churches, and representatives from Belarus, Ukraine, and Lithuania. The Pope's homily was in the spirit of ecumenism, and the spiritual, cultural, and religious testament for the coming millennium.

"We are called to build unity," the Pope said. "The unity found at the beginning of the Church's life can never lose its essential values. We must note sadly, however, that this original unity has been seriously impaired through the centuries, and specially in the last millennium."

In light of this, it would be of particular importance to speak about the great cause of ecumenism in Drohiczyn, which lies in the heart of Podlasia, "where for centuries Christian traditions of East and West have come into contact. This is a city which has always been open to Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants. Yet there have been many moments in the history of this region which have shown more than in any other place the need for dialogue, if Christian unity is to be achieved," the Pope said. In this connection, the Pope recalled his 1995 encyclical *Ut Unum Sint (On Commitment to Ecumenism)*. In it, he had emphasized that "dialogue is . . . a natural instrument for comparing different points of view, and, above all, for examining those disagreements which hinder full communion between Christians." This dialogue must be distinguished by love for the truth, since "love for the truth is the deepest dimension of any authentic quest for full communion between Christians. Without this love it would be impossible to face the objective theological, cultural, psychological, and social difficulties which appear when difficulties are examined. There must be charity toward one's partner in dialogue, and humility with regard to the truth which comes to light and which might require a review of assertions and attitudes."

It is only in the spirit of *agapē* as St. Paul understood it, that the dialogue among religions can be established and the unity of Christendom originally established by Christ, be achieved again: "Love should lead us to reflect together on the past, so that we may move forward with perseverance and courage on the path towards unity. . . . Love is a powerful stimulus to dialogue, in which we listen to each other and come to know each other. . . . Love leads us to be open to others, thus becoming the basis for human relations. . . . It purifies memory, teaches new ways, discloses the vision of true reconciliation, which is an essential premise for joint witness to the Gospel which the world needs so badly today. . . . On the eve of the third millennium, we must move more quickly toward full and fraternal reconciliation, so that in the next millennium with joined hands we can witness to salvation before a world which eagerly awaits this sign of unity."