

## Vatican by Maria Cristina Fiocchi

### Pope defends Polish sovereignty

*John Paul II invokes the enduring principles of the 1791 Constitution, which the Russian imperialists suppressed.*

**T**he problem of sovereignty or of the independence of our Fatherland, sinks its roots ever deeper into another problem, the problem of the sovereignty of the society and people of Poland today." This statement was part of a speech addressed by Pope John Paul II to 550 Polish pilgrims who were received in the Vatican on May 3, within days of the explosion of events in Poland.

The Pope went on: "One can talk of the sovereignty, the independence of a Nation only when within that nation's boundaries there lives a sovereign and independent people which can, *de jure* and *de facto*, decide on its community life." The message of the Polish Pope was clearly aimed at the government of General Jaruzelski, as an appeal that the Polish people's demands for liberty be fulfilled.

Recalling the vows King John Casimir pronounced on April 1, 1656, declaring the Virgin Mary Patroness or Queen of Poland, John Paul II underlined the importance of the Catholic faith in his people's history: "The two main threads," the Pope said, "of the history of the Church and history of the Nation from the beginning, from the Baptism of Poland, from the Congress of Gniezno (in the year 1000) are interwoven in various ways."

The Pope recalled the Constitution of May 3, which gave a great impetus to Poland, both in the social and political fields. That Constitution, approved in 1791, was republican and anti-oligarchical, modeled on the same

principles which had inspired the United States Constitution of 1787.

In 1793, as a reaction against these developments, Russia intervened militarily against Poland, and the resistance of the great patriot Tadeusz Kosciuszko, known for his decisive role in helping the Americans win independence a few years earlier, was to no avail.

The Pope concluded his homily with an appeal to the Virgin, "as King John Casimir once did, and after him many generations of our ancestors, sometimes in extremely troubled periods, in moments of crisis," that a more just social order may be implemented, returning to the principles expressed in the Constitution of May 3, because, "times can change, historical conditions, situations, but these principles always preserve their identity: They are simply laws of God, laws inscribed in the human heart, in the nature of man."

The Pope's homily, the first public comment of the Pontiff after the labor protest in Poland had broken out, was immediately broadcast by Vatican Radio and published in the Polish language edition of *Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican daily.

As of this writing, it is impossible to foresee the outcome of the Polish crisis, but it can be stated that the existence of this Polish Pope, the first Slavic pope in history, extends a special protection over that nation, which has been sacrificed to the interests of the mighty for centuries.

The theme of freedom in the countries of Eastern Europe was raised again by the Pope on the occasion of a speech of his directed to participants at a scholarly conference in Rome, on the origins of Slavic-Byzantine Christianity.

Evoking the celebrations of the millennium of the baptism of the peoples of ancient Rus', the Pope reiterated the full right of the Ukrainian and Belorussian people to participate in this important commemoration alongside the Russian people. He said, "The solemn celebration of the Millennium must be an occasion of mutual joy for all the sons and daughters of St. Vladimir and St. Olga, in full religious freedom, freedom of conscience and profession of faith. This religious freedom is a full right for the people of the ancient Rus' of Kiev—Ukrainian, Belorussian, and Russian peoples—baptized in the waters of the Dniepr—when the Church was one and indivisible in faith in Christ."

The delegation of representatives of the Holy See and the Catholic Episcopate, named by John Paul II to take part in the millennial celebrations which will be held in the month of June in Russia, will have to be the bearer of that message from the Pontiff, a message which is at the same time an auspice for reconciliation, but in respect for the truth, historical reality, and liberty.

Pope Wojtyla has previously made a point of his desire, if he were to visit the Soviet Union, to go to the heavily Catholic Ukraine, where the Uniate Church allied to Rome is outlawed, and to the captive nation of Lithuania, another Catholic stronghold, illegally annexed to the U.S.S.R. under the Hitler-Stalin Pact. Fearing the political impact of a papal visit in those regions, Moscow's leaders have refused to extend such an invitation to John Paul II.