

In Poland, Pope pleads for innocent life, brotherhood among nationalities

by EIR Staff

Pope John Paul II has just completed a 10-day visit to Poland, his first evangelical journey since issuing a new encyclical on May 1 which demanded human dignity and economic development for Eastern Europe and the Third World.

The papal visit was also the first since communism lost control of the government there in 1989, and his intention was to rejoice, not only with his fellow Poles, but with the multitudes of Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and Hungarian Catholics who flocked over the borders to join hundreds of thousands of Poles in assisting at the daily open-air masses held by John Paul II between June 1 and 9. He started the trip not in the big urban centers of the south, center, or west, but in the relatively small cities of Koszalin, in the Baltic region, Resoczw, Przemysl, and Lubaczow—all not far from the Soviet border.

The pope put the visit to his native Poland under the inspiration of the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments “forcefully articulated by God atop Mount Sinai and confirmed by Christ in his Sermon on the Mount.”

Poland's sovereign contribution: solidarity

On June 8, Pope John Paul II spoke at the Royal Castle in Warsaw, where he was greeted by President Lech Walesa, who noted that Poland is “celebrating the 1,225th anniversary of the baptism and birth of our state” and “the 200th anniversary of the passing of the Third of May Constitution—here in this very place—the charter of the wisdom and democracy of our people on a world scale.” Walesa continued, “All these memories, the present day, and our desires, are born in the centenary year of the publication of the great encyclical of Pope Leo XIII: *Rerum Novarum*. The injunctions, the incentives, the warnings of that document are necessary for today, because the Church, the population, and our country still face the phenomenon of new things.” The centenary of *Rerum Novarum* cited by Walesa has been celebrated by John Paul II by issuing *Centesimus Annus*, a social encyclical which directly counters the Anglo-American “new world order” of pillage and social injustice.

In his speech at the Castle, the pontiff reflected on these 200 years of Polish history. “Can it not be said at the same

time that the events of this century have restored us to ourselves by the same token, as the authors of the Constitution of 200 years ago say? . . . The course of the historical events in which the Polish nation has played an active role during the entire time has contributed to that. That active role in World War I appeared above all, but not exclusively, as an armed effort up to the Battle of Warsaw in August 1920. That active role in the post-Yalta stage was expressed above all as a conscious movement in defense of the sovereignty of society destroyed by the totalitarian system.”

Quoting a contemporary Polish philosopher, John Paul II said that today humanity forms a compact network of nations, strongly bound by various links, yet every nation and every individual has its unique calling. “The world cannot be understood today other than as being in a dialogue with God, who calls, repairs that which man spoils, and always gives us new opportunities. The two centuries which separate us from the passing of the Third of May Constitution were also the time of such a dialogue with God. . . . It became the content of a diversified record that marks a special period in the history of Polish culture, Polish literature, music, and art. This record endures in new generations, and should endure, as it is a special commentary on the Third of May Constitution. It pointed, and still points, the way to our Polish identity in Europe—identity as a society and as a political community.

“This is important, at the threshold of the Third Republic, because, restored to ourselves, we are still looking for the way to ourselves, to a political and also economic form of that sovereign identity which is our portion.

“Poles,” the pontiff continued, citing an Italian thinker, “can either simply enter the consumer society, taking up, if they can, the last place, before it finally closes its doors to newcomers; or they can contribute to the rediscovery of the great, profound, authentic tradition of Europe, by proposing to it simultaneously the alternatives of a free market and solidarity.

“For solidarity has crossed the Polish border. . . . Let us trust, therefore, that in introducing a free market, Poles will not cease to consolidate in themselves, and deepen, the

attitude of solidarity. An important element of that attitude is concern for human rights, beginning with the most important of these: the right to life. The point is not just to demand these rights for oneself. Solidarity also means to strive for respect for the rights of all those who have been wronged and for the weakest, especially those who are unable to defend themselves.”

The issue of unborn life

In closing, he emphasized a theme that would recur throughout the 10-day apostolic journey, a call to repudiate abortion: “Real solidarity must be integral; unborn children must not therefore be excluded from it. They, too, like all other human beings, have a right to life.” Since 1956, Poland has had one of the most liberal abortion laws in the world, and the Polish parliament, which he was addressing, has just tabled indefinitely a plan to change that law, a relic of the communist dictatorship.

Although 95% of Poles are Catholics, incredibly, half of all babies conceived are aborted, and the population growth rate has fallen below 1% per year. “I would like to ask those who are responsible for morality in Poland,” he demanded, “whether they should be permitted to take lightly the fact that they are exposing the Polish family to new destructions. . . . You cannot talk about freedom in this case, because it is a freedom which makes you slaves.”

On Polish soil, the commandment, “Thou shalt not kill,” he said in a homily in Radon on June 4, “has been violated by millions of outrages and crimes. Particularly appalling was the killing of entire nations—of Jews in particular—but also of other ethnic groups (like Gypsies), motivated solely by membership in this nation or that race.” He added, “That cemetery of the victims of human cruelty in our century is extended to include yet another vast cemetery, that of the unborn.” No human institution possesses the right to legalize the killing of an innocent, defenseless human being, the pope said. He called on the Polish people, to “help your neighbors to accept with joy their child, who—speaking in human terms—has arrived, shall we say, at the wrong moment.”

Reconciling two rites

In Przemysl—where he has named a bishop of the Uniate rite, Msgr. Jan Martyniak—less than seven miles from the Soviet border, John Paul II called for the reconciliation of Poles and Ukrainians, at the very confluence of the Western and Eastern churches. In the Church of the Sacred Heart, he welcomed the hierarchy and more than 2,000 believers of the Greek Catholic (Uniate) rite with their patriarch, Cardinal Lubachivsky, who has been back in Lvov since Easter, after 50 years of exile in the West. When everybody start applauding because he was speaking Ukrainian, the pope quipped, “When God allows me to go to Lvov, I will speak your tongue much better.” He announced that the Church would be given to the Uniates as their cathedral, solving a longstanding con-

flict between the Roman Catholics and Uniates in the region.

Warning against all impulses contrary to “universal brotherhood,” he said that as one who had come to welcome the awakening of his nation in 1979, helped its resistance in 1983, and nourished its hope in 1987, he was today making the moral demand that all must restrain nationalisms inspired by exclusion. He called for a community of Christian people around their values and nations, respecting each other for the “common good.” Those who set Poles against Ukrainians, or Lithuanians against Russians, are acting for evil, and against the “spirit of reunion,” “our highest joy.”

There have in the past been ethnic conflicts among these groups within the Church, and on one level the pope was acting to prevent such conflicts from destabilizing the area. In Przemysl he warned, “To light again old nationalisms would be an anachronism. . . . We meet to thank God because the Church in Ukraine could come out of the catacombs. Even in the most audacious dreams it was difficult to foresee that, at the end of the second millennium, [that] church would conquer back its freedom and its right to live and develop. Not even one bishop of this Church denied its belief and left the unity with the rock of St. Peter, even if the persecutors did their best to achieve their aim.”

These words evoke those in the encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, which describe the heroism of the Church in Poland in the last decade’s battle against communism. The implication—spreading freedom into Ukraine and other western parts of the Soviet Union—could not be missed, especially with 10,000 Ukrainian Catholics having crossed the border to listen to him.

In Lubaczow, the pope said, “From this piece of land which belongs to the diocese of Lvov [in Ukraine], I must look beyond the border,” and smiled when he saw a huge banner with the words, “Moscow Awaits the Pope of Rome,” in the crowd of 500,000.

Material goods are not ends

On economic policy, too, John Paul II recalled concepts developed in the encyclical. “Never should you aim at material goods as if they were ends in themselves,” he told the Poles. “The economic reform in our homeland should be accompanied by a growth of social engagement, by an even greater attention to the common good.”

These teachings counter the pervasive message from such Western oracles as Harvard University, who hawk “free market consumerism” in Eastern Europe like a new deity, even as production in those countries continues to fall, and morale declines under such “free market” shocks as the news that Poland, once a world leader in coal production, now imports coal. Warsaw is full of products that almost no Pole can buy—plus Coca Cola, fast food, and “sex shops.” The Pope ruthlessly attacked this new evil, and stressed that to stop human labor by using financial rationalizations is an anti-human policy.