

# Pierwsza Pielgrzymka Papieża Jana Pawła II

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## Introduction 1979

On the 40th anniversary of the June "revolution of the spirit"

The first of John Paul II's three pilgrimages to his subjugated homeland commenced on 2 June 1979. The Pope visited Warsaw, Gniezno, Częstochowa, Cracow, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, Wadowice, Oświęcim, Nowy Targ and again Cracow. The official motto of the apostolic journey was taken from the opening words of a hymn in honor of St. Stanislaus of Szczepanów - 'Gaude Mater Polonia' (Rejoice, Mother Poland).

For the Catholic Church in Poland and the communist government, the election of a Pole as Pope on 16 October 1978 immediately brought to the fore the issue of his visit to his homeland. As early as 6 November 1978, almost immediately after his return from Rome, Polish Primate Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, in an address to the faithful congregated in the Warsaw cathedral, stated openly: "And there is hope that the Holy Father wants to come to Poland as soon as possible. The best opportunity is the celebration in honor of St. Stanislaus in Cracow, set for 13 May of next year. Perhaps on this occasion, the Holy Father will see more than Cracow and Częstochowa. Allow me, as a discreet person, to seal my lips and not let my heart speak, but rather commit these thoughts to your hearts. What you pray for will be for the benefit of the Church in Poland and in Rome." Within their closed circle the communists bluntly defined their attitude to the Polish Pope and the 'tragedy' that had to be addressed. On the necessity of engaging in discussions on the topic of the Holy Father's visit to Poland, Stanisław Kania, responsible for the state's religious policy, commented, "At this moment it is

already clear that to the throng of internal problems a new one has been added, and an imported one at that." During the party conference on 2 March 1979, he continued his argument, "This is definitely not an event to be pleased about. A great effort will be needed to minimize the adverse effects of this visit."



Moscow categorically advised against approving the Pope's arrival, but Edward Gierk - finally - was given a free hand in the matter. In secret talks held from December 1978, the authorities consequently haggled over the date of the Holy Father's visit. They did not want to agree to the aforementioned May date, when the long-planned ceremonial celebration of the 900th anniversary of the martyrdom of St. Stanislaus, a patron of

Poland, was to take place in Cracow. The date of the pilgrimage was finally set for 2-10 June 1979. Still under discussion however, was the itinerary of the trip, which of course was tied to the extent of the Pope's influence on the catholic community in Poland. A joint church-state Organizational Committee, which included representatives of the Vatican, was created. Its official task was to coordinate support measures for the papal pilgrimage. The authorities prepared themselves for the pilgrimage independently of the Committee, as part of the Security Services' [SB] covert operation under the code name 'Summer of '79'. The chief of staff was Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, Gen. Boguslaw Stachura, who appointed special teams for surveillance, operational and technical activities on a national scale, as well as in the voivodships where the Pope was to travel. The authorities mobilized thousands of Citizens' Militia [MO] officers, as well as all Security Services organizational structures at head office and provincial levels; officers' leave was revoked, and at the same time hundreds of active secret collaborators and sleeper agents were mobilized in order to infiltrate church and opposition circles. The task of all services under the command of the communists, apart from the obvious provision of security to the Holy Father, was to reduce - as stated - the harmful effects of the Polish Pope's visit. In the Organizational Committee, the communists used their ostensible concern for the security of John Paul II to apply pressure on the hierarchs to limit the number of meetings of the Pope with the Catholic community and also to introduce limits on admission passes permitting participation in church ceremonies. (For example, the authorities deemed the Church's agreement for the Pope to be transported around Poland by helicopter rather than by car, their success: "It's a technical matter, but its significance goes beyond the technical aspects. Namely, it will not be conducive to the gathering of crowds on the route," said Kania, to convince his party comrades.)

The Polish Episcopate, priests and the catholic community were also preparing for the papal pilgrimage independently of arrangements carried out by the Church commission in the Committee - spiritually, through prayer, as well as organizationally. The church for their part also created an event security team, which was to safeguard pilgrimage routes, as well as to ensure order in sequestered church facilities during the Pope's visit. From

this unit, a permanent lay organization in the Church was established: the 'Totus Tuus' Church Honor Guard Service, operating during subsequent pilgrimages of the Holy Father and larger church celebrations such as Corpus Christi processions.



Along the whole route of the pilgrimage, which began in Warsaw, the Pope was greeted by vast assemblies of Catholics, as well as especially decorated homes and balconies. The Poles listened to the words of a man who spoke truthfully to a nation who had been living for years in the deception that reigned in the media, the work environment and even encroached into the family. The state authorities unexpectedly pulled back. 'We stood up and saw how many of us there were' was how this event was reminisced about

in Poland years later. The Holy Father spoke about the history of the nation, about human rights, about democracy and the right of Poles to freedom. He talked about the false version of history from recent decades, as well as events kept from official school curricula. "The exclusion of Christ from the history of man is an act directed against man," he stated on the Victory Square in Warsaw. "Without Christ [...] it is impossible to understand this nation that had a past so glorious - but at the same time so terribly difficult [...] It is impossible to understand this city, Warsaw, the capital of Poland, which in 1944 decided on an ill-matched fight with its invaders, a struggle in which it was abandoned by the Allied Powers [...] there cannot be a just and right Europe without an independent Poland on its map [...] And I cry out from the depths of this millennium - let your Spirit descend and renew the face of the earth. The face of this land." That day all Poles listened to him.

During a youth meeting, there was a delegation of Catholics from Grodno among the people bringing gifts. To the surprise of the nearby entourage (which included Security Service officers), from a bundle they took out a cross in three pieces that had been smuggled across the border. In Gniezno, the Pope then welcomed a delegation from Czechoslovakia who had arrived illegally. Invoking the words of poet Juliusz Słowacki, John Paul II reminded them that he was a Slavic Pope and demanded the right to religious freedom for the entire European continent. At Jasna Góra, the Primate of the Millennium and John Paul II paid homage to the Virgin Mary, thanking her for her protection over the nation: "The Holy Father read out his 'Marian Confession of Faith' in a voice full of emotion," stated Cardinal Wyszynski in his book *Pro Memoria*. "He publicly promised to entrust himself and his mission in the Church to the Mother of the Church." The Primate noted, "At Jasna Góra the Holy Father engaged once again in dialogue with the catholic community; of acclamations and singing, there was no end." Everywhere he went, the Pope was accompanied by Polish youth, and his meetings with them - in Warsaw, in Częstochowa, and later in Cracow - went down in history. A memorable meeting at Błonia in Kraków, as well as a meeting on Franciszkańska St., during which the Pope, from the balcony, entered into dialogue with the crowds of believers, became symbols of the intrinsic relationship between the Church and the nation. Especially memorable were the words uttered at the end of the homily in Błonia, in the presence of at

least a million believers: “You must be strong, dear brothers and sisters [...] You must be strong with the strength of faith [...] Today more than in any other age you need this strength. You must be strong with the strength of hope that brings the full joy of life and does not allow us to sadden the Holy Spirit! [...] And that is why [...] I am asking [...] that you would never doubt and never become weary, never be discouraged [...] that you would trust [...] that you would always seek in Him the spiritual strength that so many generations of our fathers and mothers have found there.” The government circles reacted to the Pope’s every word on an ongoing basis. The authorities sent protests to Abp Agostino Casaroli, urging him to influence the Pope and the content of his ‘unorthodox’ homilies: “Every evening Mr. Kania conveyed to me remarks or concerns of the government about what the great guest had done or said during the day, or might do or say the next day,” recalled Casaroli.





The pilgrimage of John Paul II came to an end. The Primate of Poland, still in an atmosphere of exultation from what had taken place, noted, "The greatest achievement in the religious and historical dimension was the very fact of the Holy Father's presence in Poland: 1. This of course has religious and ecclesiastical significance - the revival of contact of Catholics with the Church; a connection with the Pope, who has ceased to be a mythical abstraction, but has become a tangible (and to what extent!) reality for every Catholic as well as for those detached from the Church. 2. Socio-political importance - because this highlights the essential value that the Church has for the Nation and its culture today. 3. Political and international significance - because it shows Poland in the world, at the center of world focus, it encroaches upon the [Communist] Bloc, separated by the Iron Curtain from those forces that are not recognized by the monopolistic rule of the totalitarian Party. The visit has weakened the wall that divides Europe into two worlds. [...]

In this sphere - Moscow has ceased to be the only master. There is another power which is desired by the world imprisoned in diamat [dialectical materialism]." The Pope's visit and future of Church-State relations were also at the center of the debate of the Permanent Council of the Polish Episcopate in Jasna Góra, with the participation of John Paul II. The Pope summarized the opinion of Polish bishops (principally the Primate and Bp Bronisław Dąbrowski, secretary of the Episcopal Conference), "First, one needs to wait with this initiative [in establishing diplomatic relations with the Holy See - J.Ż.] until they [the communist authorities] want it enough to accept all the conditions. That is the proposal." The Pope adhered to this proposal until the very end of the eighties, when, in July 1989, after the June elections, Vatican City entered into diplomatic relations with a resurgent

Poland.

A fuller assessment of the visit was also made in government bodies shortly after the pilgrimage. The Pope's visit was analyzed in the Administrative Department of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party: "On the ideological level, it is not just that the Church has not resigned from confrontation, but it should be assumed that it will continue to develop its forms and methods. Above all it will pay particular attention to perpetuating the outcome of the Pope's visit and the symbols associated with it, especially in the sense conveyed on the Victory Square, appointing itself as the carrier of national culture responsible for passing on national traditions, and approaching youth and workers' circles." A search for preventive measures which were to 'integrate society, Catholics and non-Catholics around the program of further development of the country' was called for. What the more enlightened representatives of the authorities recognized was how limited the government's offer was, as well as the impending defeat of the communists and their atheistic ideology - Marxism-Leninism - which had been raised to the rank of state doctrine.

As Poles, we are in agreement today that the visit of John Paul II to Poland in June 1979 was the foundation of all subsequent systemic changes that took place in the nineteen-eighties, including the creation of the 10-million member Solidarity movement, and the regaining of freedom and independence by Poland and countries of the entire Soviet bloc. May the memory of the universal Church and Catholicism in Poland as bearers of freedom always remain alive, so that we, as Poland and Europe, never become the next land of slavery and the home to slaves!

Prof. Jan Żaryn

## Powiązane informacje

- [External link](#)  
John Paul II (1920-2005) - IPN's booklet (following

the link you will find more information on attached .pdf document)

- [External link](#)  
"The Pope from Behind the Iron Curtain" – Cracow-Budapest
- [External link](#)  
IPN Home Page (English)
- [External link](#)  
An Archive Full of Remembrance