

Piotr:

Good morning. It's a very great pleasure to be with all of you and to take part in this conference on the occasion of John Paul II and Ronald Reagan's legacy. Although I feel myself as sort of an artifact. What I would like to say to you would be kind of an eyewitness report.

Let me start with a quotation. It will be a long quotation from the editorial published in the Warsaw underground press, written by us (the editors at the time) in May 1979, a few days before first visit of the Polish pope to Poland.

For the people of Poland, the election of Karol Wojtyla during a conclave in faraway Rome was, regardless of a sense of well-deserved satisfaction, astonishing, and elevation and joy were even greater. Awareness of how closely the event relates to the fate of the whole nation will become apparent only during those several days in June when John Paul II will visit Poland.

The effect will be increased identification of the Polish people with the Catholic religion in public life. People will more often describe themselves as Catholics, although believers are still treated by the authorities as second-class citizens. Being Catholic will now become a way of identification with the Polish Pope, who is going to personify the so far scattered emotions, hopes and wishes.

Religious phenomena are never isolated from social phenomena – especially in Poland, where the Catholic Church is the most powerful institution independent of the communist authorities, as well as a sign and warrant of endangered national identity. Just imagine the large crowds of people who will come to the cities of Warsaw, Częstochowa, Gniezno and Kraków, the amount of initiative which will be released during preparations for John Paul II's visit and you will realize not only what attitudes this motion shall reveal but also what effects it may cause.

Millions of people will be together – literally and metaphorically speaking. The society will be able to count its number, and the result of this poll, impossible to be faked because everybody will see with their own eyes, must seriously influence the common imagination, the society's judgement on itself

It will obviously have political implications as we must not forget that the pope is coming to the country at quite a critical time. The last 35 years have brought to the Polish people a threat of spiritual sovietization and economic malaise. As the crisis of the communist power deepened over the last couple of years, independent underground institutions have embarked on increasingly popular effort to rebuild civil society though a Social Self-Defense committee called the Society of Educational Courses, The Defense Movement, Farmer's Committees, independent labor unions, and underground uncensored press, and up until then — hopelessness. A dire result of Poland's political situation made the Polish communist party rule much, much easier.

The far-reaching implication of the papal visit may, however, turn out to be a great significance for the Poles' sharp imagination. It is bound to steer national identity at the

deepest level. The papal visit will likely be unlike any other event. John Paul II becomes a symbol of hope. Hope that victory over the trials of the history is possible. A nation that has suffered so many misfortunes and humiliations may overcome the lack of faith that so often plagues so deeply and repeatedly to the disappointed.

After all, the symbols that comprise national identity often prompt actions, moves, effects seem most real. It all has a deep effect on us living on the Vistula River, but we must be aware that this phenomenon is also important for other European captive nations living under Soviet rule. This is particularly true of Ukraine, Lithuania and Belarus, where Catholics and the union with Rome are still alive. John Paul II's visit is not exclusively a "Polish event", just as his stay at Pueblo was not exclusively a Mexican event.

This is what [it was like] in Poland in that time — and then he came. He met 13 million Poles in the course of 9 days. He came like a sovereign; the communist stewards having disappeared. The Pope ruled everything — from the Polish hearts to the communist militia, completely unnecessary by the way. He talked about human rights, about freedom, about the necessity of being in solidarity with each other, about community. He talked to all of us, but we felt that he was talking to each of us individually. He turned into nothing decades of communists' efforts, whose power was based on fear and destruction of the feeling of national community. He also talked about responsibility — everybody's responsibility for everybody. He talked about God. And we answered with millions of voices singing "We want God" — "My chcemy Boga" as the words of an old, Polish song go. His words brought back to us the very basics of the Polish nation's existence, with its roots in Christianity and Roman republicanism.

Poland is a strange state where elected kings ruled *Res publica* —shaped after the Roman example. The Slavonic state where the elites spoke Latin. We listened to his words, chanted, and transfigured. City streets suddenly turned into meeting places where we exchanged smiles. Overcome with joy, we found a sense of bond with strangers standing next to us. We felt free at last — and then he left.

A year had passed and the Poles arose. The phenomenon of "Solidarity" — a liberation movement of 10 million people — came into being in three months. The fact that it came into being as labor union was, in a way, by chance. It was in fact another Polish uprising. August 1980 became a milestone not only in Polish history, but also in the history of Europe and the World. It was so, because it heralded the end of communism. And without John Paul II there would not have been "Solidarity".

Ronald Reagan observed the events in Poland. By that time, he was a veteran of resistance against communist falsehood. Suffice it to recall his struggles with the unions infiltrated by the communists in Hollywood. Thanks to John O'Sullivan¹ we know about his emotional reaction on the TV relations from John Paul II's visit in Poland. He cried. He was so deeply moved. I think that it was then, when he found a great ally in Karol Wojtyla.

I think so because when asked by Richard Allen in 1977 about his Cold War strategy Ronald Read said: "My theory of the Cold War is that we win and they lose." (it is also thanks to John O'Sullivan that we know this). He needed an ally when he was setting off on his crusade. And then shots were fired.

Hinckley was insane, but Ali Agca was Moscow's tool. The President and the Pope suffered alike, and they shared the conviction that God our Lord wanted them to complete their mission in this World. The experience of being a target of assassination attempt at almost the same time must have brought them together.

Ronald Reagan was called a crusader, and he was one. What it meant for him was that he made his decisions and actions based on his faith in God, and on the conviction that "the evil empire" also exists. This conviction probably became the basis of the President's alliance with the Pope, who by restoring hope and sense of dignity deprived this empire of its subjects. They met.

John Paul II's message to the nations of the world was that the roots of freedom are in the Gospel and in God, and that it is everyone's inherent right. Ronald Reagan decided to take care of the freedom of nations in practice. It was not an easy thing to say, in the early 1980s, that the aim is to bring about the collapse of the Soviet Union. What is more, that he intended to do it with peaceful means!

They were both courageous. They were also visionary and consistent. They were romantic, in the Polish meaning of mystical romanticism, yet, at the same time they were cautious, aware of dangers, and ... often practical. They were patient, they could wait. And most of all, they kept their sense of humor through all this. It is important that the leaders do not lose the sense of humor.

The martial law in Poland, arms race imposed by Reagan on the Soviets, problems with the Europeans, infiltrated by the communists, who protested against Cruise and Pershing Missiles; Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Grenada, etc., these were lesser and greater fronts of the war declared by Ronald Reagan on communism, a war actively supported in the sphere of ideas and spirit by John Paul II, in accordance with the credo addressed to the cardinals after his election: "We should all strive, with all possible means, to make all forms of injustice, which still come out in our times, a subject of our common consideration and search for proper solutions, so that all people can lead a truly human life." They won.

The enslaved nations of Central Europe reached for independence, Berlin Wall collapsed and so did communism in Russia soon after that. Between 1989 and 1990 one could believe that the world of freedom triumphed over the "evil empire". Also, in the metaphysical sense. It may have seemed that Bulgakov's Behemoth will never again wreak havoc around Moscow. Wrong!

A quarter of a century has passed since the seemingly final victory of the Western Civilization over the Eastern Satrap and... we have a problem again!

Minutes after the victory, the idea of West, the West with capital 'W', was pushed out of the public discourse. Francis Fukuyama announced the end of history..., but look – the old is back, dressed up in new clothes. Decadence and lack of ideals permeate the West. Real dreams are overwhelmed by media mush.

John Paul II and Ronald Reagan entered the historical stage at a time of crisis. It seemed then, in the 1970s, that communism was winning on all fronts, the Soviet Union was triumphant, terrorism supported by Moscow threatened Western democracies. And yet they managed to overcome all this. Unfortunately, their success lulled their successors.

The West is in crisis. And this is a crisis originated at its roots, by negation of the fundamental values of our civilization which formed it and gave it strength. The problem was revealed during the discussion on the Preamble to the proposed European Constitution. A significant group of European politicians decided to block the reference to the Christian roots of our identity in it. The transatlantic ties are creaking, Europe is unable to make decisions, the situation obviously resembles the last decades of the Roman Empire ... Are we facing the same fate? Will the works of our classical authors have to be saved by monks in some few monasteries? Will we have to experience the age of fall and slavery again? I exaggerate, many will say. However, it is worth considering.

The future depends on us, on our choices of leaders capable of understanding the legacy of the Polish Pope and the Great American President. There are signs of awakening. The American, Polish and Hungarian people have set the example. We may have a chance if the nations of the West find the right people amongst them. The West needs leadership, without it we will be deep in trouble in the years to come.

John Paul II's and Ronald Reagan legacy is short: "Don't be afraid." Don't be afraid of free thought, idea, don't be afraid to trust in God for the fate of your nations, don't be afraid of hardships and be wise. Simple, isn't it?