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PILGRIMAGE OF DIGNITY:
POPE JOHN PAUL II'S JUNE 1979 VISIT TO POLAND

UNDERGRADUATE HONORS THESIS
SUBMITTED TO DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
WRITTEN UNDER THE DIRECTION OF
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BY
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Abstract

Pope John Paul II’s first visit to Poland took place in June of 1979. The pilgrimage was arguably one of the most important trips of his pontificate. Within a matter of days the Pope was able to transform Polish society, inspire hope, and ignite a sense of collective dignity. Through a series of rhetorically powerful speeches the pilgrim awakened the oppressed nation and questioned the foundations of Communist authority to rule. Talking about the inalienable rights of man, the Pope stirred up a longing for freedom that matured with the birth of the Solidarity Movement in 1980. His epical journey ultimately changed the course of Polish history.
THIS THESIS PROJECT MEETS IN MAGNITUDE AND QUALITY THE DEPARTMENT'S STANDARDS FOR HONORS IN HISTORY.

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Introduction

The visit of John Paul II to Poland in 1979 was an event of substantial significance. Although the pilgrimage is a well documented affair, many sources fail to convey its complexity and importance for Polish history. They often describe the event with a shallowness and insufficiency that falls short of the pilgrimage’s historical meaning, especially failing to analyze its impact on the public opinion. What the days of June 1979 brought to the Polish society was a unique experience of unity and collective awakening. Within the course of nine days the Pope, through his adamant attitude and symbolic messages, was able to question the fundamentals of Communist rule. He exposed the regime’s weaknesses, its dictatorial mode of communication, and underlined the foreignness of the state-imposed ideology. John Paul II achieved yet a greater victory, however, showing that there was an alternative way for the country. Bringing hope to a nation that had been bound within totalitarian confines for more than thirty years, he made the society believe that through a united effort and dignified attitude they could bring about desired socio-political changes and ultimately challenge the Communist rule.

The culmination of his efforts took place with the birth of the Solidarity Movement in the summer of 1980, when the Polish society began its obstinate and non-violent revolution.

The purpose of this essay is to illustrate how the pilgrimage of John Paul II achieved this momentous effect, to describe how the Pope was able to challenge state authority and inspire the society with the power to question the repressive status quo. Yet, above all, the aim of this work is to capture a turning point in modern Polish history that manifested itself through a collective awakening that was realized in August of 1980.
The Role of the Catholic Church in Poland

Before one can comprehend the ramifications of the papal visit, it is necessary to understand the role of Church in Poland. The Catholic Church had, and still has today, immense influence over Polish society. The roots of this influence can be traced back to the Counter-Reformation, but they are especially noticeable during the last two centuries of Polish history. Following more than a hundred years of partitions and foreign rule in Poland throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Catholic Church emerged as the one of the few bastions "of the Polish national identity." With no formal state apparatus at hand, it became a cultivator of spirit, language, and tradition. Hence, after the First World War and the rebirth of the Polish State, the Church assumed the role of one of the most prominent national institutions, affecting virtually every social group from peasantry to the intelligentsia and political elites. Nonetheless, the secular character and multiethnic make-up of the Second Republic of Poland limited the Church’s aspirations of complete socio-political domination. Still, the status of the institution during interwar Poland became a model that the clergy tried to revive after the dramatic ordeal of 1939-1945.

The Second World War and its aftermath brought significant changes to Poland’s social and political realm that simultaneously affected the Catholic Church. Suffering great devastation and loss of millions of lives, which included a considerable number of the clergy, Poland underwent a process of reorganization. Paradoxically, Communist

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1 Stanislaw Gomulka and Antony Polonsky, eds., *Polish Paradoxes* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 78.
2 Ibid., 77-80. The Second Republic lasted from 1918 to 1939.
3 The successive Nazi and Soviet occupations purged Poland of substantial Jewish, Ukrainian, and German minorities, making the country more ethnically homogenous and more Catholic after the war than ever before.
rule initially did not try to eradicate Catholicism. On the contrary, during the years 1945-
1948 the Church’s infrastructure was restored, religious instruction allowed in schools,
and clerical property was not confiscated. The short period of truce between the Church
and the Communist apparatus allowed for a partial regeneration of the institution’s
influence.

Subsequent years, however, witnessed a turn in the official line of the state that
signified a close adherence to Marxist ideology. Starting in 1949 the Communists waged
an open war against the Catholic Church, trying to establish their social and political
hegemony. Within a year the ruling authorities forced a closure of Caritas, an influential
Catholic welfare organization, causing the Church to lose “an important channel of
interaction with society.” What followed was a deliberate policy of abolition, which
included confiscation of the Church’s property, suspension of religious education in
schools, and selective imprisonment of the clergy. The oppression culminated in 1953
when the Primate of Poland, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, was arrested and interned until
“the thaw” of 1956.

Following the period of de-Stalinization, state policy took another twist and the
Church’s situation improved dramatically. Władysław Gomułka, who became the first
secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) in 1956, recognized the need for
state-society dialogue to energize the country, denounce Polish Stalinism, and restore the
Party’s authority. As a means to this end, he made the Church a “mediator in relations

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between the Communist Party and society;"6 accidentally reestablishing its political and social influence. However, the interactions between the Church and the state quickly deteriorated in the 1960s as Gomułka became dissatisfied with any infringement of his semi-dictatorial authority. With the intent of regaining supremacy, the government tried to exert control over the Church’s internal affairs through ecclesiastical appointments and removals. These actions met with resistance on the part of the Church and Cardinal Wyszyński openly criticized the authorities and accused them of imposing an “alien” philosophy onto the population.7 Although the tensions continued, the Church seemed to be gaining momentum.

Perhaps the most evident confrontation between the two opponents occurred in 1966 when the Church was commemorating the millennium of Polish Catholicism. To highlight the significance of the occasion, the Polish Episcopate invited Pope Paul VI to participate in the festivities. However, the Communist government feared the potential repercussions of such a visit and denied a visa to the head of the Catholic Church.8 In the subsequent decade the weakening authority of the government prevented the Party from repeating this hard-line position. But in 1966 the Gomułka leadership tried its utmost to compete with the ecclesiastical celebrations, organizing luncheons that attempted to legitimize the Communist rule in Poland and underlined the inevitability of the Marxist revolutionary process. The Church’s response, which emphasized the inseparability of Polish history and Catholicism, proved equally effective and influential. Invoking the name of the Virgin Mary, “the Queen of Poland,” during his sermon at the holy site of Częstochowa, Wyszyński called upon the nation to fortify itself against the totalitarian

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6 Gomulka and Polonsky, Polish Paradoxes, 86.
7 Oliner, Nationalities Papers 8, 56.
8 Kubik, The Power of Symbols, 112.
state, pointing to the Church as a source of that strengthening power. In the struggle for control over people’s minds the Church became a worthy, yet highly uncomfortable opponent that persisted in challenging the Communists for the years to come.

The decade of 1970s witnessed further advancement of the Church’s influence, which aids in comprehending the events of 1979. Despite the promise of the new regime embodied in the person of Edward Gierek, who replaced Władysław Gomułka as the first secretary of the Party in 1970, the Communist authority continued to diminish. Simultaneously the population of priests, monks, and nuns increased noticeably, as did the number of churches and religious educational institutions. The Church’s influence among all of the social classes grew steadily as the institution made its principles more accessible through the popular “Weeks of Christian Culture” and religious song festivals known as “Sacrosongs.” Addressing different social issues such as family life, politics, and morality, these events provided an alternative to official government teachings. The Party attempted to compete with the Church in the cultural sphere, but it continued to lose. The society started to view the Church as the guarantor of morality and an adamant defender of social justice. Soon enough the emerging political opposition of the 1970s came to rely on the institution’s moral support as its greatest asset. Moreover, the ongoing process of secularization, so desired by the Communists, came to a halt in the mid-1960s and the reverse phenomenon took place. The period of 1970s experienced a “movement of religious renewal . . . under the protection of the Church, but with

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9 Ibid., 113-114.  
10 Oliner, Nationalities Papers 8, 57.  
considerable autonomy, spontaneity and pluralism.”13 By the end of the decade the Church’s influence flourished and the institution was powerful enough to question the fundamentals of Communist rule in Poland. Seeing the growing authority of the Church, Gierek was often forced to seek the support of Cardinal Wyszyński as a mean of pacifying the increasingly dissatisfied society.14 In this light it would seem likely that the first secretary would grant permission for Pope John Paul II to visit Poland when Polish religious officials expressed such wish in 1978.

Preparations for the Pilgrimage

Yet before an agreement on the papal trip was reached, the Church and the State underwent a series of tedious negotiations, which proved to be an ordeal of strength for both sides. Cardinal Karol Wojtyła was elected to the highest office of the Roman Catholic Church on 16 October 1978, assuming the name of John Paul II. The day after the election, Bishop Bronisław Dąbrowski of the Polish Episcopate expressed his hope that the Pope would be able to participate in the upcoming religious jubilees in Poland. The celebrations he had in mind included the sixth-hundredth anniversary of the presence of the Black Madonna painting in Częstochowa and the ninth hundredth-anniversary of death of Saint Stanisław, the bishop of Kraków.15 The Communist authorities were evidently caught by surprise with the Wojtyła’s ascension to the papacy. The initial response of Kazimierz Kąkol, minister of the Religious Affairs Department, was one of

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13 Gomułka and Polonsky, Polish Paradoxes, 92.
14 Ibid., 94.
moderate cordiality to the idea of a papal pilgrimage in Poland. Soon enough, however, the government officials realized that the presence of John Paul II at the celebrations commemorating the death of Saint Stanisław could pose a threat to their authority.

Stanisław Szczepanowski, the patron saint of Poland, was a bishop of Kraków in the eleventh century. Throughout the centuries he had become a symbol of defiance to tyrannical rule and a defender of moral order. Learning about King Bolesław the Bold’s maltreatment of his knights and their wives, he excommunicated the ruler, making himself the object of the monarch’s rage. Saint Stanisław was killed on 11 April 1079 by royal henchmen acting on the king’s orders. The exhumation of his corpse ordered by Karol Wojtyła in 1963, archbishop of Kraków at that time, revealed a hole at the back of his skull, supporting the hypothesis that he was murdered without a trial. While the saint remained an icon of resistance in the popular image, the Communist authorities tried their best to downplay his role, portraying him as someone who interfered in King Bolesław’s governance. The Church opposed this representation and described the saint “as a martyr who fell victim to royal tyranny and brutality, the premier symbol of necessary ecclesiastical resistance and counterbalance to state power.” Such depiction was viewed as especially threatening by the Communist authorities and hence their apprehension to the timing of John Paul II’s visit.

Interestingly enough the Polish leadership was divided on the issue of the pilgrimage. Higher members of the PZPR, including Gierek, took a welcoming stance, viewing the event as potentially useful for the propaganda purposes. The lower members,

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16 Ibid., 8.
18 Kubik, The Power of Symbols, 130-133.
having a better understanding of the popular moods, feared the visit might ignite social
turmoil.\textsuperscript{19} As negotiations continued the attitude of the Communist authorities was
expressed by Stanisław Kania, secretary of the Central Committee responsible for
Church-State relations, who declared that the decision of whether or not to come was in
the hands of the Pope, but the question of when to come was dependent on the state.\textsuperscript{20}
Intent on further exploring the issue, minister Kąkol and the representatives of the Polish
Episcopate met several times throughout the late 1978 and early 1979 to resolve the
problem.

One such meeting between the head of the Religious Affairs Department and
Cardinal Wyszyński took place on 23 November 1978. During the talk minister Kąkol
brought up a series of arguments aimed at discouraging the visit due to its unsuitable
timing and occasion. He claimed that the pilgrimage might turn into a political
demonstration, containing anti-state undertones, evoke unnecessary emotions, and
present the international media with an opportunity to intensify its anti-Polish sentiments.
The calm and calculated response from the Primate of Poland included reminding his
interlocutor that the Pope had not yet even agreed to the invitation.\textsuperscript{21} Another memorable
conversation between Kąkol and a representative of the Episcopate, Father Orszulik, took
place on 19 December 1978. This time, however, it was the Church official who assumed
the argumentative position, highlighting the sensitivity of the issue and pointing to
possible repercussions of not allowing John Paul II to visit his home country. Orszulik
argued that “the Church will not lose anything, if the Pope will not be allowed to come to
Poland. However, the political administration, the government, could subject itself to

\textsuperscript{19} Szajkowski, \textit{Next to God}, 62.
\textsuperscript{20} Raina, \textit{Wizyty Apostolskie Jana Pawła II w Polsce}, 8.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 9-10.
immense difficulties both in the country and abroad.  

At this point the Church demonstrated a profound understanding of the tense social situation in the country and skillfully made use of its first-hand knowledge of the Polish community to exert pressure on the Communist leadership. Unprepared for such a twist, Kąkol could only stress that the authorities would prefer the Pope not to come by repeating his arguments about the political character of the visit and its potential for inspiring social disorders.  

Nonetheless, the talks remained fruitless as long as John Paul II himself did not openly express his wish to accept the invitation. On 11 January 1979 the Pope did more than that, stating that it was his “duty” to participate in the celebrations commemorating the death of Saint Stanislaw in Poland and making his plans overtly clear. Realizing the pilgrimage was inevitable, the authorities found themselves caught between a hammer and an anvil. Pressured by the Soviet leadership to veto the trip on one hand and popular demand on the other, they were forced to choose between lesser of two evils. The decision to allow for the pilgrimage seemed to have been reached at the beginning of 1979, which was evident in a phone conversation between Gierek and the Soviet leader Brezhnev. While Moscow warned about the dangers of such a choice, the Polish Party boss remained adamant, proclaiming he simply could not disallow the visit. In return Brezhnev accused Gierek of being a bad communist and hung up angrily.  

The Church and Polish political leadership were now left to settle the issue of timing of the Pope’s visit. Although the feast of Saint Stanislaw fell on the fifteenth of  

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22 Quoted in Raina, Wizyty Apostolskie Jana Pawła II w Polsce, 10-11, my translation.  
23 Raina, Wizyty Apostolskie Jana Pawła II w Polsce, 11.  
24 Szajkowski, Next to God, 63.  
May in 1979, the Communist authorities were determined to push for a different time due to its clear anti-state connotations. One initial compromise proposed that John Paul II come to Poland in August instead of May, but ultimately June was decided as the month of the papal trip. The Party leadership viewed the negotiations as a success; they were glad to avoid the politically dangerous timing. Another victory entailed forbidding the Pope to visit the towns of Nowa Huta and Piekary Śląskie, both with significant numbers of blue collar workers, a group especially screened from the Church’s influence.  

Nevertheless, what appeared to be a triumph was a mere illusion that quickly turned into a fiasco. The final settlement involved John Paul II staying in Poland for nine days and visiting six cities as opposed to two days and two cities in the original scheme envisioned by the Church. Furthermore, the Pope himself saw no reason to yield to Communist pressures and simply extended the date of the Saint Stanislaw anniversary celebrations until the Sunday of the Descent of the Holy Spirit (3 June 1979) and the Sunday of the Holy Trinity (10 June 1979), which happened to coincide precisely with his stay in Poland. Thus, the premature joy on the part of the Party leaders swiftly changed into a feeling of anxious waiting.

On 2 March 1979 the unimaginable became real as an invitation to the leader of the Catholic Church was issued by a country dominated by Marxist ideology, via a joint communiqué from the Episcopate and state authorities. In his segment of the message, Primate Wyszyński thanked the Pope for his willingness to visit Poland and satisfying social expectations. The note from Henryk Jabłoński, head of the State Council, was more telling since it expressed the state’s attempt to objectify the purpose of the

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26 Szajkowski, *Next to God*, 65.
pilgrimage and remind about the dominant ideology in Poland. Highlighting that the Pope was coming to his fatherland, the People’s Republic of Poland, Jabłoński was convinced that the trip would “contribute to the unity of all Poles and intensification of cooperation between the Church and the socialist state.” The pilgrimage was to take place 2 – 10 of June and the Pope was to visit four venues: Warsaw, Gniezno, Częstochowa, and Kraków.

Still, once the announcement about the papal trip had been made, the state propaganda apparatus felt obliged to remind everyone that the Party was the leading

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29 Raina, Wizyty Apostolskie Jana Pawła II w Polsce, 34, my translation. In a separate statement sent directly from Jabłoński to John Paul II on 2 March 1979, the state official also expressed his hope for the visit to stimulate the Church-State relations as well as improve the People’s Republic of Poland’s position in the world. For details see ibid., 35.

30 The real number of towns visited by the Pope was actually greater than four, the communiqué was somewhat misleading and oversimplifying since it only included the four bigger urban locations.
authority in the country. Different channels of the Communist-controlled media emphasized the precedence of Marxist ideology over any form of religiosity, stressing that the working class’s loyalty was with the Party. Simultaneously, the Communist leadership began the process of indoctrination within its own ranks to counterbalance the explosive potential of the pilgrimage. This essentially reactionary attitude was clearly evident in one of the PZPR’s publications on 10 March 1979 in which the authorities remarked that the “main purpose of this visit is an attempt to soften our system ideologically . . . [and] our major task is to preserve our party in good ideological shape.” As a means of preparing for the upcoming event, the Party also disseminated instructions to school teachers describing the dangers associated with the pilgrimage and asking them to intensify their efforts of youth ‘atheization’ in order to weaken the Church’s social influence. The actions taken by the state were a significant sign of distress before the approaching event. However, given the state of social dissatisfaction with the ruling elite, the Party’s preparations were too little too late to make a noteworthy difference and reverse the effects of the impending earthquake.

The Church and the government had to discuss one last matter before the visit could commence, namely media coverage. Being well aware of the unfavorable consequences of the pilgrimage, the Communist elites reverted to one of their last resorts in order to preserve the status quo. Designing a precise plan for the media to cover the visit, the Party was determined to make use of whatever authority to rule was left to manipulate the public perception of the event. This time, however, the state appeared to achieve a victory over the Church as strict limitations on media coverage were imposed.

31 Szajkowski, *Next to God*, 64.
33 Ibid., 134-135.
The scheme meticulously outlined which newspapers could cover the event, how many pictures of the Pope were to be published, and what subjects of John Paul II’s speeches were suitable for broad coverage. Radio and TV reporting was another major issue to be resolved. The Church officials recognized that the pilgrimage was the institution’s unique opportunity to make an appearance after years of being banned from the country-wide media. Hence, they contended that John Paul II’s stay should receive the most extended coverage possible. The representatives of the Church further supported their claims through the event’s high public significance. Communist leaders eventually agreed to broadcast a considerable portion of the visit. This choice, however, was not a sign of submission to the Church, rather it was backed by a cold calculation aimed at reducing the number of people who would personally participate in the masses. Moreover, these televised broadcasts turned out to be strictly directed with the picture focusing on the Pope and avoiding showing the huge crowds. One French journalist remarked that “the coverage resembled the broadcast of a soccer match in which the cameras show you everything but the ball.” Lastly, a few days before the pilgrimage officially began the state intensified its propaganda of discouragement. The evening news would regularly warn about possible traffic inconveniences, uncontrollable crowds, and excessive heat.

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34 Szajkowski, Next to God, 65-66.
35 Weigel, Witness to Hope, 302.
The Visit

With less than a day until John Paul II’s arrival, Poland was undergoing an extraordinary transformation. Although the general populace experienced the feelings of anxiety and great expectation, a joyous and friendly atmosphere also persisted. The public remained surprisingly calm, waiting for the event with a sense of proper solemnity. Kazimierz Brandys’s observations from 1 June 1979 help in capturing the overwhelming social mood:

There was no sense of pressure in that enormous number of people: the crowd undulated slowly, people moved without bumping into each other, made way for each other. . . . For the first time in years I walked the streets observing people curiously, exchanging smiles with the people I passed. And I did not feel a single moment of danger, no twinge of fear or anger. . . . I tried to describe the leisurely pace of the crowd, but didn’t succeed in conveying what had moved me the most deeply – the atmosphere, at once serious and free, and, more than anything the inward bond uniting people. 38

The general mood was an indication of how the society would react to the upcoming event. The transition from a gloomy and depressing reality to an optimistic and festive state was very suggestive. Poles were preparing themselves to welcome perhaps the greatest of their compatriots and the state authority appeared powerless in disturbing the optimistic frame of people’s minds. The expectations of the pilgrim were reaching their zenith; now it was time for the Pope to properly channel the population’s emotions.

Around 10 a.m. on 2 June 1979 a plane with John Paul II on board landed at the Okęcie Airport in Warsaw. 39 From the very beginning the Pope started to fulfill his plan of spiritual renovation. His actions, easily comprehensible for the Polish society, contained a note of meaningful symbolism. Immediately after getting off the plane the

39 Zuchniewicz, Papież nadziei, 37.
Pope knelt down and kissed the ground, shocking thousands of people watching the broadcast of the official greeting ceremony. For many John Paul II’s behavior was a “powerful sign, conveying to whom the Pope had come to visit. . . . The authorities had to wait, because he came to visit Poland, not the Communist ministers and secretaries, although they were the ones who staged themselves for the official welcoming [at the airport].”\(^{40}\) It quickly became clear that the pilgrim would not subject himself to the purposes of the state propaganda. His election to the highest office in the Roman Catholic Church, and his subsequent visit to his homeland, was above all a success for Poland and the Catholic nation that constituted it, not a victory for the representatives of People’s Republic of Poland. John Paul II’s attitude towards the Communist officials was about to be eloquently expressed in his first major mass celebrated at the Victory Square in Warsaw.

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The venue selected for the first mass gathering in the capital city was a place of high significance for Polish independence. Victory Square was, and still is, the site of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, a sight that brings back memories of Poland’s long, and often painful, past. The Pope knew exactly how to employ this theme in his powerful homily. John Paul II’s oration started by accentuating his bond with the jovial crowd. He spoke of himself as a son of the Polish land, a countryman who happened to be an ordained pilgrim spreading the word of Christ. Throughout the speech he evoked the name of Saint Stanislaw several times, reminding his listeners about the symbolic power of the patron and reaching into the depths of the Polish tradition. His message was focused on celebrating Christianity and revolved around religious themes, yet it simultaneously contained overtones directly related to the current socio-political situation. Reflecting on the millennium of Polish history the Pope observed:

The Church brought Christ to Poland, i.e., the key to understanding this great and fundamental reality that is man. For man cannot be fully understood without Christ. Or rather, man cannot fully understand himself without Christ. He cannot understand who he is, nor what his proper dignity is, nor what his vocation is, nor what his final destiny is. And so Christ cannot be excluded from history of man in any part of globe. . . . It is therefore impossible to understand the history of the Polish nation, this great thousand year old community, without Christ. If we reject this key to understanding our nation we consign ourselves to a fundamental misunderstanding. 41

John Paul II’s words were an open criticism of Marxist ideology, imposed on the Polish society, which rejected the Christian legacy. They challenged the Communist authority to rule emphasizing how alien the state doctrine was for the nation. For those present at the square, the pilgrim’s message questioned the social norms which had prevailed until then, it disputed the “symbiosis of private

religiosity with public conformity.” Soon enough the phrase “Poland could not be understood without Christ,” became a landmark of his homily.

To the dismay of government officials John Paul II did not stop at the issue of religion in face of the ruling elite’s dominant ideology. He continued to reach into the country’s past, evoking the memory of the heroic insurgents of the 1944 Warsaw uprising – a symbol of free and independent non-Communist Poland that was at the time omitted from Party history books. Referring to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier he talked about the significance of this monument which “speaks with (the fallen soldier’s) death that there can be no just Europe without an independent Poland located on its map.” Describing the soldiers’ sacrifice, he alluded to the everyday sacrifice that each member of the society needed to endure and equated this burden with the country of Poland. The papal homily ended with words that became engraved onto the mind of the national consciousness:

And I cry, I who am a son of the Polish land, and at the same time I who am John Paul II, I cry from all the depths of this millennium, I cry on the vigil of Pentecost:
Let Thy Spirit descend!
Let Thy Spirit descend!
And renew the face of earth.
This land!
Amen.

For the crowd of three hundred thousand people John Paul II’s message was overwhelming. His words, pronounced with conviction and simplicity, had a stimulating effect. Adam Michnik, one of the leading oppositionists, later

42 Michnik, Tischner and Żakowski, Miedzy Panem a Plebanem, 286.
44 Ibid., 50, my translation.
remarked that the homily at Warsaw’s Victory Square was a moment of genuine freedom, experienced for the first time in his life, with no sign of the infamous Communist security apparatus at hand. Yet, it was more than just the Pope’s address that made him distinctive. His mannerism, gestures and attitude contributed to his perception as “a personality of radiance (with) the power of unrelenting spiritual and physical labor.” People began to succumb to this truly charismatic character, who offered an unimaginable novelty and inspired impossible sensations. John Paul II’s first speech had a profound effect on the nation’s minds and hearts.

By the second day of the visit, John Paul II began to sense the transformation that was happening before his eyes. Early in the morning on 3 June 1979 the pilgrim celebrated a mass for Polish youth. Speaking to an immense gathering outside of Saint Anna’s Church in Warsaw, the Pope deliberated over the issue of the value of man. He asked the young crowd how a human being should be evaluated and immediately supplied the answer – through the measure of heart. At this point the homily was interrupted by the throng, which applauded John Paul II’s words and chanted “We want God,” a popular religious song. Upon hearing this long disturbance the pilgrim diverted from his speech and shared a personal reflection with his listeners. He recognized the clapping as a form of dialogue, which established an intimate connection between the speaker and the audience. To John Paul II, “it was not so interesting that they clapped,

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47 A similar occurrence took place during the first mass at the Victory Square. The Pope’s homily was held up several times with the crowd singing “We want God” and clapping spontaneously. The interruptions were to become a norm for the remainder of the visit.
applauded, but when they applauded." The Pope completed his digression, jokingly observing that this society has suddenly become a theological society. Interestingly his remarks appeared to correspond to the people’s perception of the event. Renata Prawdzic noted that the Pope’s meetings with his compatriots represented an odd combination of a massive crowd on one hand and a well organized, collective meeting on the other. This was stimulated by the Pontiff’s multivalent speech that “suddenly moved to a dialogue, then a prayer, at the same time becoming a poetic text.” It was this diversity of form as well as richness of the content that made the Pope’s speeches so vivid and influential. In the space of a day he had presented the society with a style that was vastly different from the official language of state authorities.

Having finished his homily in Warsaw, John Paul II was transported to Gniezno where he delivered another landmark speech. Orating in the ancient capital of Poland, he talked about the roots of Polish Christianity. His homily invoked the memory of Saint Adalbert, another martyr-patron of Poland, who was associated with spreading of the Catholic faith. This time, however, the Pope’s speech touched on wider European dimensions. Reminding the crowd of Saint Adalbert’s Czech origin, he referred to the Christianity of Slavs. John Paul II asked if it was not his duty as “this Polish Pope, this Slavic Pope, to reveal the spiritual unity of Christian Europe, which is composed of two great traditions: that of the West and that of the East?” His sermon highlighted the common roots of all the nations in Europe and focused on the transcending value of religion.

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48 Szub, Pielgrzymka Do Ojczyzny (1980), 58, my translation.
50 Szub, Pielgrzymka Do Ojczyzny (1980), 68, my translation.
Before concluding the speech, the Pope expressed his most sincere wish that this
message of unity was being heard by every Pole living abroad as well as every
Slav on this planet.\textsuperscript{51}

The pilgrim’s words were a significant attempt to reconcile the divided
spheres of European politics. They underlined the dire ordeal of Eastern Europe
and suggested that the region had made a noteworthy contribution to the
continent’s “common cultural heritage.”\textsuperscript{52} John Paul II’s message was again
striking in comparison to the official state propaganda. It attempted to consolidate
rather than divide, illustrating the artificiality of political rhetoric. Unlike the
Communists, the Pope sought to highlight that all Europeans had something in
common and it should be on this platform that they resolve their differences and
look for understanding. Furthermore, the ramifications of his speech were all
encompassing. Although talking to a crowd of Poles, he was in fact reaching out
to all Western Europeans, drawing a picture of Eastern Europe that might have
been long forgotten by them. His words were addressed to Moscow as well,
containing a profound critique of the Soviet regime’s ideological framework and
undermining its attempt to create non-existent boundaries between nations. The
Pope’s politically charged homilies and his unyielding attitude were making the
Communist authorities increasingly apprehensive.

By the time the second day of the visit came to an end, the Polish Party
leadership realized that they needed to intervene. The authorities were highly
concerned by how quickly and intensely John Paul II had been able to inspire the

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{52} Michnik, \textit{Letters from Prison}, 165.
society. Fearing destabilization and loss of power as well as the Soviet leadership’s reaction, they decided to express to the Pope their discontent.

Stanisław Kania was selected to act as a representative between the authorities and the pilgrim’s entourage. In a letter to Cardinal Franciszek Macharski, a friend and successor of John Paul II in Kraków, he summarized the Party’s dissatisfaction. Kania complained that the Pope had not yet blamed the responsibility for Poland’s destruction on the Nazis, “never mentioned the 600,000 Soviet soldiers who had died liberating Poland, and expressed no public appreciation for the achievements of socialist Poland, beginning with the country’s reconstruction after the war.” Such rhetoric, the Communists apparently hoped, would lessen the contradiction between the Pope’s message and state propaganda. Yet in light of John Paul II’s reconciliatory speeches that stressed the need for tolerance and inter-personal dignity, this strategy proved rather frail. Importantly, however, the pilgrim did tone down the political connotations of his homilies for the next three days as he remained in the holy sanctuary at Częstochowa.

John Paul II’s stay at the most important site of Polish Catholicism began on 4 June 1979. In the course of these next days, the pilgrim celebrated multiple masses, met with clergy, students, intellectuals, and workers as well as participated in a conference of the Polish Episcopate. During his first homily at Częstochowa he talked about the symbolism of the location, comparing it to the beating heart of the Church and the fatherland. Alluding to the Virgin Mary, the

“Queen of Poland,” John Paul II spoke about motherly love, which he connected to the idea of personal fulfillment and freedom. He argued that love is an expression of freedom, but at the same time implies a sense of belonging or servitude. It was this servitude that made all of the pilgrims coming to Częstochowa ultimately joyous and free. His homily ended with an act of entrustment to the Virgin Mary, which was the very same procedure done by the Primate of Poland in 1966 to commemorate the millennium of Polish faith. The character of the Pope’s stay at the holy site and the content of his addresses were unquestionably more religious than during the first two days of his pilgrimage.

Nevertheless, the last day of John Paul II’s pilgrimage at Częstochowa also signified a return to political symbolism. Before leaving for Kraków, his home diocese, the Pope preached a homily to workers from Upper Silesia and Zagłębie Dąbrowskie. Among them was a group of laborers from Piekary Śląskie, the very same industrial town he had been forbidden to visit by the Communist authorities. In his speech John Paul II talked about the value and ethics of work. He attempted to show that the people’s hard labor and Christian faith went hand in hand. His message warned about rejecting God and prayer, and treating work as just a means sufficient for human existence, which was a direct allusion to the state imposed doctrine. “Man shall not live by bread alone,” argued John Paul II, for he requires a spiritual dimension that is expressed in the “experience of the generations that have cultivated this earth.” Concluding the homily, the Pope asked the workers to pray and direct their prayers to Rome, and promised that

54 Szub, Pielgrzymka Do Ojczyzny (1980), 87-88.
their calls would be rewarded. Saying his goodbye to Częstochowa that evening, the pilgrim invited everyone to come to Kraków and participate in the mass that would commemorate the anniversary of Saint Stanisław.\textsuperscript{56} The final stage of the trip was about to commence.

Another crucial day of the pilgrimage was 7 June 1979 when the Pope paid a historical visit to Auschwitz death camp. The homily he delivered then could be ranked among the greatest orations of all time. In his speech, John Paul II was able to create an explicit dichotomy between good and evil, faith and godlessness. In the opening of the sermon, he spoke of Auschwitz as a special place of man's victory through faith – a victory of love. A truly remarkable triumph for this location was "built on the negation of faith – faith in God and faith in man – and a radical tramping of not only love but any signs of humanity; a place built on hatred and contempt for man in the name of a mad ideology."\textsuperscript{57} John Paul II invoked the name of Blessed Maximilian Kolbe, a monk who sacrificed his life for another inmate, and others who through their actions achieved a victory over the cruel apparatus. His words were a testament to the power of faith and a condemnation of totalitarian ideology. The Pope asked whether it was astonishing to anyone that he, a person born and raised in the land where the death camp is located, devoted his first encyclical to the issue of human rights and dignity. Commenting on the inalienable rights of man, he observed how easy it is to destroy these rights by "arming one with the apparatus of violence and imposing an ideology where rights of man are subjected to the demands of the

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 212.
\textsuperscript{57} Szub, \textit{Pielgrzymka Do Ojczyzny} (1980), 201, my translation.
system, absolutely subjected so that they practically do not exist at all." In the
concluding section of his homily, John Paul II spoke of the different nations that
suffered in this atrocious place, highlighting three of them: Jewish, Russian and
Polish. He remarked that no nation should develop by exploitation, conquering, or
enslavement of another. His message was delivered with an ardent conviction as it
was the son of a nation, which suffered plenty of hardships from others, who was
talking. However, the Pope asked his audience to not make him “name those
others,” which was an allusion to the USSR, currently in control over Poland. His
remarkable speech ended with the hopeful wish humanity be spared from
plague, hunger, and, especially, war.

While John Paul II’s homily partially responded to the concerns of the
state authorities, to the vast majority of those present his sermon was a refined
critique of the Communist system. Michnik observed that the ambiguity of the
speech evoked memories of victims of totalitarianism killed in the gas chambers
as well as those “turned into glass in Siberian camps.” The Pope was not
condemning one system in particular, but every authoritarian order that degraded
man and deprived him of dignity. Furthermore, his stress on love, unity and
mutual understanding contrasted intensely with the message of hate and
vengeance that the Polish dignitaries wanted to invoke. John Paul II’s words were
only affirming what the Polish Catholic Church aspired to achieve. They
portrayed the institution as a defender of human morality, which did not
necessarily imply Christian morality, and exposed the state’s weaknesses,

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58 Ibid, 202, my translation.
59 Ibid, 205, my translation.
60 Michnik, Letters from Prison, 167.
questioning its right to set moral standards. The Auschwitz address was a truly awakening experience that contributed to the overall force of the Pope’s homilies. Nonetheless, perhaps the most influential sermon of all during the pilgrimage was yet to be delivered.

Prior to his final speech delivered at Krakowskie Błonia on 10 June 1979, John Paul II spent his remaining days in the Kraków vicinity. He visited his hometown of Wadowice, the upland city of Nowy Targ, and stopped at a sanctuary in Mogiła-Nowa Huta, where he again demonstrated his uncompromising attitude to the Party’s politics. Nowa Huta was a site of significance for both the Party and the Catholic Church. An industrial suburb of Krakow, the town was a model of socialist utopia. Designed and constructed entirely after the Second World War along the lines of socialist-realism, it was the first municipality in Polish history not to have a church. The place continued to be a bone of contention between the two sides for decades, hence the ban on the Pope’s visit to Nowa Huta that was fiercely defended by the Communists during the preparations of the pilgrimage. Yet the sanctuary of the Holy Cross at Mogiła, situated in close proximity to the industrial town, proved near enough to attract scores of workers. The address delivered by John Paul II on 9 June 1979 was directed to them. In his homily the Pope spoke about the fundamental value of work, which is inscribed in the Cross of Christ. His words touched on the dignity of labor and dignity of man. The pilgrim reminded his listeners that “Christ will never allow that man be considered, or that man consider himself, merely as a means of production, that
man be measured or valued in line with this principle."61 His sermon was a well balanced speech of political and religious significance. On one hand, the Pope brought up the holy symbolism of the sanctuary. His message tried to highlight the inseparability of work and faith. On the other hand, his words were a direct attack against the state ideology, which often materialized labor and degraded its value. Given the circumstances, it was an address too well understood to leave anyone confused about its meaning. Having only one day left, the Pope and the society were preparing for the moment which marked the climax of the pilgrimage.

Fig. 3. Mass at Krakowskie Błonia.

61 Szub, Pielgrzymka Do Ojczyzny (1979), 280, my translation.
The final mass at Krakowskie Blonia held on 10 June 1979 was a spectacular event. Attracting anywhere from 1 to 3 million people, it is believed to be the biggest mass event in the history of Poland. It was celebrated on the Sunday of the Holy Trinity and the Pope was ready to conclude the jubilee commemorating the death of Saint Stanislaw with a strong accent. The homily opened up with the pilgrim pondering the question of the purpose of human existence. John Paul II remarked that going forward, making progress, meant having a sense of direction or a goal. He observed that man is a free and self-conscious being, capable of reaching the truth. At this point he made an allusion to the current socio-political situation by asking the crowd if it was possible to exclude Christ from one’s life. Providing the answer the Pope said:

Certainly, one could. Man is free. Man is capable of saying ‘no’ to God. But the fundamental question remains: is it permissible to do so? And in name of what is it permissible to do so? What kind of rational argument, what kind of value of one’s will and heart would it be possible to place before oneself, your fellow-countrymen, and your nation in order to reject all that we have lived on for a thousand years? To all that has created a base of our identity and always constituted it?62

His words offered the crowd a simple choice between the current shape of Poland and a state without the oppressive Communist ideology. In order to help the attentive throng with the decision, John Paul II summoned Saint Stanislaw “the patron of the Christian moral order, the order created through the people.”63 To further accentuate the significance of the saint he compared the ninth-hundredth anniversary of his death to the sacrament of Poland’s Confirmation. His rhetoric was slowly building to a culmination, in which the Pope made his wishes quite explicit. He declared:

63 Ibid., 262, my translation.
You have to be strong, dear brothers and sisters! You have to be strong with the power that comes from faith! You have to be strong with the power of faith! You have to be faithful! Today you require this strength more than in any other age. . . . [You have to embrace this power of] hope and conscious, mature, responsible love which helps in initiating the great dialogue with man and with the world at our stage of history.  

His words conveyed a message of encouragement and a call to action that seemed especially influential and almost tangible to the crowd, given the freshly aroused atmosphere of his trip. They inspired hope and portrayed a sense of a common goal that could be achieved through a collective effort. Finally, John Paul II made his intentions very clear in the concluding section of the sermon when he remarked “you shall not be afraid!” and begged his listeners to hold this “spiritual heritage called Poland” in best esteem.  

By the afternoon of that Sunday John Paul II was saying his farewell to Poland. Making a brief speech before the departure, he referred to his pilgrimage as an act of bravery for both sides, the Communist authorities and himself. The pilgrim concluded by saying “sometimes one needs the courage to go in the direction that no one else has gone before.” His last words, broadcast on country-wide television, left the Polish nation with a clear a resolution to act, to have the courage to do what no other country in the Soviet bloc has done. It was now the society’s turn to capitalize on the great legacy placed before them.

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64 Ibid., 264, my translation
65 Ibid., 265, my translation.
66 Jan Pawel II, Autobiografia (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2002), 134.
67 Zuchniewicz, Papież nadziei, 158, my translation.
Popular Reactions and the Visit’s Aftermath

The reactions to the Pope’s visit indicate how profoundly the experience transformed the society. The departure of John Paul II left the nation with feelings of emptiness and sorrow. The experience was similar to losing someone close, a family member. However, the social mood changed promptly and an aura of extraordinariness prevailed. Poles began to question the ramifications of the pilgrimage and reflect on the phenomenon. One of the observers remarked that “in a sense the event continued, people everywhere did not stop to live, interest, relate, and deliberate on it.” The society started to realize that the pilgrimage caused a deep spiritual renovation, which had serious implications on the socio-political sphere. The common conception of the event could be characterized as an act of social enlightenment where “people gained trust in themselves, trust in their strengths and trust in collective dignity.” Oddly enough those who followed the pilgrimage day after day had the same perception as those who experienced only a small segment of the nine-day tour. The impact of the visit appeared to be transcending and all-encompassing as the country witnessed a peculiar type of collective transformation that intensified through referring to the visit.

The scope of the Pope’s addresses went beyond the religious and spiritual aspects and offered the society a perspective to which it was unaccustomed. Unlike the rulings of the government, John Paul II’s messages took a form of a dialogue or negotiation. The pilgrim did not label or exclude anyone from his

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68 Papież i My, 310.
69 Papież i My, 268, my translation.
70 Ibid., 269, my translation.
homilies, instead he provided “everyone with some sort of proposition – an offer of authenticity,” which was hardly noticeable in the Party’s reign. The authenticity of the Pope’s words made a great impact on his listeners. Several people remarked it was this feature of the pilgrim’s presence and addresses that contributed to the extraordinariness of his visit. John Paul II was able to inspire emotions that vividly contrasted with the society’s notion of itself – a powerless and depressing image especially intensified by the dire economic situation and the totalitarian governing apparatus. He presented the people with alternate ways of conceiving the reality, hoping that the society would question the socio-political status quo. His homilies juxtaposed two visions of human existence: one characterized by an absurd reality, constructed and reinforced by Communism, and an other marked by the truth and authenticity inspired by the belief in Christ and stimulated by free speech.

The Pope achieved this effect through differentiating his style of deliveries from the official Party messages. As a person educated in rhetoric he “knew how an orator or a writer achieves the difficult art of simplicity, knew perfectly well the literary possibilities of creating an effect through poetic tropes, [and knew how to] employ pathos, which he used in a masterly way, usually in the close vicinity of reticence.” Capitalizing on this knowledge he presented the society with fresh and vibrant addresses that helped in acquiring an important point of reference. John Paul II placed under consideration the Communists ways of

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71 Michnik, Tischner and Żakowski, Miedzy Panem a Plebanem, 287, my translation.
72 Papież i My, 304, 321, my translation.
interaction with the people. Through his unparalleled manner of speaking he exposed and magnified the submissive mode of totalitarian communication. The Pope’s style was vital because it ultimately evoked questions about the Party’s authority to rule.

Yet, the pilgrim’s great rhetorical talent was only partially responsible for the effective conveyance of ideas. John Paul II made his intentions clear through a series of symbolic gestures easily recognizable for the spectators of the visit. One witness of the papal trip observed the event was full of “situation-symbols,” which were very expressive in themselves. Whether it was kneeling down and kissing the Polish soil, preaching to a crowd at the Victory Square, or paying a historical visit to Auschwitz, a place where love triumphed over oppression, the Pope’s actions contained an explicit message. They represented an expressive “short-cut” so fundamental that their meaning was understood prior to the masterfully delivered sermons. John Paul II appeared to employ every mean possible to make sure his presence in Poland was remembered and influential. Besides using his evident oratorical skills, which often involved conveying complex notions, he modified his behavior to make it symbolically legible. Combined with the Pope’s way of being, characterized by “simplicity and openness, some strange internal radiation of authenticity,” such mode of expression turned out highly successful.

Interestingly, for many observers the papal visit inspired reflections on Poland’s past. The event served as a bright turning point in the country’s history,

74 *Papież i My*, 329-330, my translation.
75 Ibid., 332, my translation.
vividly standing out from the past two centuries marked by defeats and tragedies. The election of Karol Wojtyła to the rank of pope and his subsequent visit in his homeland evoked a poignant emotion “for these new facts confronted with the [negative] feeling of history inherently inscribed [in Poles].” In this way, the pilgrimage was an impulse for deliberation on the national fate. Thinking of what the visit meant from a historical stand-point, the society could reflect on its complicated past and equally difficult modernity. These thoughts were further stimulated by the content of John Paul II’s homilies that often brought up the country’s past. Speaking about the heritage of Poland’s thousand year old community, the Pope intensified the significance of the contemporary era in the state’s history. As Adam Michnik remarked, the visit was “a national plebiscite” where the Poles were being asked to decide on the future shape of their country. The pilgrim inquired whether they preferred a state of totalitarian oppression or one based on freedom and inalienable rights of man. This historical consciousness of the society proved highly unfavorable to the governing elite, for it degraded Communist rule to the relatively insignificant status of one oppressive regime among many. Furthermore, its ideology made it something that markedly stood out from the country’s historical continuity.

However, the deliberation on history stimulated by the nine-day trip was not exclusively limited to the fate of Poland as a socio-political entity. More importantly the papal addresses raised questions about the meaning of individual existence as well. For one of the spectators, the pilgrimage was “an hour, in

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76 Ibid., 353, my translation.
77 Michnik, Letters from Prison, 163.
which man went face to face with his own manhood, in focus talking to himself, his own past . . . and from this dialogue he extracted his lost dignity, uniqueness, exceptionality, his entire treasury as a human being." In this sense the papal visit elevated the individual self-perception of Poles. It improved the overall self-esteem showing that each individual life carried a value in itself. Furthermore, it allowed from an important realization that every member of the society equally participated in this great historical process and could influence its outcome. The inspiration of such notion was once more striking in contrast to the curious arrangement of power in the People’s Republic of Poland. For a state in which authority was supposedly shared by all, only a visit of dignified guest appeared to produce the effect that every citizen mattered.

Another powerful result of the papal homilies involved creating a sense of unity. The pilgrimage was a unique experience for the Polish society because it was a celebration that overwhelmed the masses. One of the observers of the event noted it was “a joyous, sincere, and religious holiday” that brought the different individuals together. As the Pope delivered his addresses, the attentive crowds resembled a family of relatives more than a throng of strangers. They reacted in unison, experienced similar sensations and prayed as a single collective. These moments of concentration and shared feelings of joy were exceptional for they “liberated [the crowds], united, and saved them from the grayness of the everyday life and the fear of it.” It was John Paul II’s unique ability to simply convey his thoughts that contributed to the creation of a unified space. The pilgrim knew very

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78 Papież i My, 364, my translation.
79 Ibid., 272-273, my translation.
well how to direct the societal attention and cognition. The distinctive character of his addresses transformed “this obnoxious collectivity of individuals into an extraordinary unanimity.”\textsuperscript{80} He filled the society with a revived strength and made them conscious of their national pride and dignity. In a mere nine days John Paul II inspired what the totalitarian regime feared the most – a unified collective which within a course of a year turned its force against the constrictive government.

The feeling of social unity that the pilgrimage aroused was connected to another important, however abstract, emotion. John Paul II’s short visit was a manifestation of freedom especially highlighted in the freedom speech. The Pope, who had a characteristic manner of carrying himself, mesmerized the crowds that watched him. He maintained a courageous attitude and did not shy away from taking risks in his homilies. But as one of the spectators of the event remarked, the risk did not overpower the pilgrim. He remained free and uninhibited and his glowing autonomy had in turn a liberating effect on the society. For the listening crowds the Pope was a personification of freedom based on the valor and conviction of Christ as well as the profound freedom of the spoken word.\textsuperscript{81} In this manner the visit of John Paul II was instrumental in bringing hope to those who fought for liberty against the totalitarian state. The pilgrimage reinforced and extended the limited space of freedom, aiding those individuals “who worked on its expansion.”\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 282-283, my translation.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 307.
Interestingly the feeling of liberty inspired by the pilgrimage seemed to transcend the abstract sphere and take a material form. Father Józef Tischner observed that the phenomenon became clearly distinguishable in people’s behavior during the days of June of 1979. Reflecting on the meaning of the experience, the cleric said, “It was freedom that walked, freedom that knelt down, freedom that rose up from its knees . . . freedom comes when one meets another free man. When a slave meets a free man, he will either hate the other for his freedom, or become free himself.”

John Paul II was bringing to his homeland a quality lost over three decades earlier. He awakened the Polish nation and asked it to take on the great responsibility that was contained within the freedom he was offering.

The effects of the pilgrimage were by no means temporary. John Paul II aroused feelings so dignified and extraordinary that many began to consider how his message could be extended. Calling the visit “a necessary therapy of joy and love,” Anna Kamięńska marveled: “what could be done to maintain it for longer, for ever?” Her reflections were a characteristic sign of curiosity which lived long after the Pope was gone. The society wondered how it was possible that a visit so short could make such an unusual impact, simultaneously recognizing the challenge placed in front of it. Being aware of the papal call to be courageous, people were eager to fulfill the demanding appeal. As one of the spectators of the visit remarked, the best way of achieving this difficult task led through cultivating

83 Michnik, Tischner and Żakowski, Miedzy Panem a Plebanem, 290, my translation.
84 Papież i My, 310, my translation.
“the moral climate” of the June days. Awakened by John Paul II’s homilies and attitude, Poles realized that change was necessary for the well-being of the nation. And the best way for accomplishing this transformation was contained in duplicating and prolonging the social mood stimulated by the visit.

However, it was not exclusively the atmosphere created by the pilgrim that evoked further reflection on the event. People analyzed the Pope’s message and sought ways to apply it to their lives. Again it was John Paul II’s great rhetorical talent that significantly contributed to this effect. His addresses were able to reach everyone separately despite the fact he was preaching to the masses. Regardless of the different backgrounds of the people who listened “everything that the Pope said ideally corresponded to individual feelings.” Ironically the heavy censorship of the pilgrimage only intensified the common desire to study papal homilies. Reflecting on the impact of the visit Adam Stanowski expressed his hope that everyone made an effort to acquire and contemplate on the meaning of the Pope’s texts. He wanted Poles to ask themselves, “‘what happens next? What do we have to do now? Each of us individually and everyone together.’”

Similarly it was the personal dimension of John Paul II’s sermons that Adam Michnik found the most moving. Deliberating on the immense responsibilities outlined in the homilies he felt obliged to inquire “whether we can really handle these ‘enormous tasks and obligations.’ Or more precisely: Can I handle them?”

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85 Ibid., 357, my translation.
86 Ibid., 335, my translation.
87 Michnik, Tischner and Zakowski, Miedzy Panem a Plebanem, 290, my translation. This observation is especially striking as it was made by Adam Michnik, former Communist and an individual with a Jewish background.
88 Papiez i My, 351, my translation.
89 Michnik, Letters from Prison, 167.
The remarks included in these observations help in understanding the broad influence of the Pope’s presence in Poland. Even if the pilgrim failed to stimulate the society through the unique atmosphere of the masses he celebrated, he ultimately succeeded in inspiring the people’s intellect. Balancing on the verge of sensation and thought his message attempted to stir up virtually every segment of the national consciousness, whether it was one mentally or emotionally aroused.

Besides the two above mentioned aspects of the pilgrimage, John Paul II’s visit resulted in a phenomenon most difficult to capture in words. The trip produced a mysterious spiritual reformation that had an immeasurably deep influence on the society. Even before the Pope’s departure several priests observed the unusual spiritual potential aroused, which manifested itself through increased participation in religious sacraments.90 For the vast majority of the nation, the pilgrim reorganized and simplified the values conveyed in Catholicism. He made them readily understandable and revived the meaning of religion. John Paul II achieved this despite the prolonged attempts of the government to battle any organized systems of beliefs. As one of the observers noted “Christianity was presented [by the Pope] in its great dimensions, as a fundament of the universal order and the base of humanistic manhood.”91 This novel portrayal of faith resulted in a collective shock that could be best comprehended as the Sacrament of Confirmation, or reinforcement, of the entire country. The transformation was so immense that another spectator of the nine-day tour compared it to an uplifting of the society to a higher level. He remarked

90 *Papięt i My*, 292.
91 Ibid., 355, my translation.
that this metaphysical experience allowed for “hovering over the life of commonness, taking a look at [Polish] destiny and the entire reality from great heights, as well as recovering of a reference point and adequate proportions.”\textsuperscript{92}

Inspiration of the spiritual dimension by John Paul II seemed to complete the range of emotions produced by the visit. The referral to religion served as a potent starting, and ending, point, which made the pilgrim’s homilies influential on several levels. If the Pope could inspire feelings so abstract and intangible, no restrictive machinery of the Communist apparatus would limit him from spreading his unique message.

This feeling of unusual spirituality so vividly experienced by the society was even more intensely registered by the group of people directly associated with the Church. For the members of the clergy who witnessed the visit, the connotations were obvious. They compared John Paul II’s travel in Poland to the pilgrimages of Christ himself. The Pope, like Jesus, was spreading the good word among the forsaken and hopeless crowds. His actions were an expression of Christian values, of love and unity. The pilgrim did nothing to inspire hate; on the contrary his goal was to reconcile enemies. John Paul II’s presence was unique for it fulfilled the message contained in the Gospel.\textsuperscript{93} Never before did a person so extraordinary visit the state. Hence to one of the ecclesiastical observers the end of the Pope’s journey was equivalent to ascension. And his 1979 visit to Poland

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 360, my translation.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 341-342.
ought to be remembered as the passage of Jesus who “walking [though this land] did good.” 94

John Paul II managed to stimulate emotions especially pertinent to the sphere of spirituality, but these sensations were not exclusively constrained to the religious dimension. The Pope inspired a feeling of dignity for which the society appeared to long. He reminded of a value that is indivisible from the fundamental rights of man. Yet, the type of dignity the pilgrim had in mind included a great degree of responsibility. He urged his listeners to “take risks, face their challenges, for it is the only way that man maintains his identity, freedom and a sense of dignity.” 95 Having deliberated on the papal words people seemed to comprehend what was being asked of them. Adam Michnik further observed the pilgrimage became “a lesson of dignity” that disclosed a peculiar characteristic of humanity. He noted, “man is a very strange being. He can spend years without dignity, if he is deprived of any hope of achieving it. But then even a small sparkle of hope suffices and the need for dignity awakens with a great force among the enslaved people.” 96 The Pope appeared to provide the spark, which in time turned into a blazing fire of liberty.

The papal visit ultimately awakened the society’s sense of consciousness, revealing its hidden strengths. Renata Prawdzic concluded that the pilgrimage “created a precious psychic capital, pointed to the people’s hidden internal reserves and particles of spiritual matter, which could and should be turned into

94 Ibid., 382, my translation.
95 Ibid., 364, my translation.
energy.\textsuperscript{97} The papal message, so influential and delivered in masterly way, was causing an inner revolution. However, the process in which the "reserves were turned into energy" did not occur instantaneously. It took the Polish society several months to channel the emotions aroused by the visit. Having finally discovered the strength contained within, Poles felt empowered to confront the Communist authorities. Thus, to some of the spectators of the June days it was clear that "the real end of the pilgrimage took place in August of the following year."\textsuperscript{98}

 Those August events in 1980 revolve around the mutiny of polish laborers and the foundation of the Solidarity Movement. One of the first inferences that the population arrived at from the Pope's visit was that it could take power into its own hands without the intervention of the state apparatus. Several observers noted that the mass gatherings were model examples of social discipline, order and inter-personal kindness. The throngs were well organized and responsive to the specific situation. People obeyed instructions and no one acted disruptively.\textsuperscript{99} The transformation was especially astonishing given the experiences of standing in queue, an inseparable element of life in a Communist state. This time, however, no one seemed to push forward or try to gain an advantage over others. The crowds reacted in accord and harmony, which only contributed to the solemnity of the masses and the uniqueness of the pilgrimage. The ability to self-organize and maintain restraint proved a very valuable skill employed by the protesting workers of August 1980.

\textsuperscript{97}Papież i My, 334, my translation.  
\textsuperscript{98}Michnik, Tischner and Żakowski, Miedzy Panem a Plebanem, 290, my translation.  
\textsuperscript{99}Papież i My, 271, 293, 351.
Conclusion

Fourteen months after the epic pilgrimage Polish society finally capitalized on its potential. On 14 August 1980 workers of the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk went on a strike demanding reinstatement of their colleagues, higher wages, and a monument commemorating the events of 1970.\footnote{Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1984), 39. In December of 1970 Gdańsk was a site of a bloody confrontation between the shipyard’s workers and the military. As a result at least 42 people were killed and over a thousand wounded.} Their resistance represented something more than a desire to improve their personal well-being. After two days of negotiations the shipyard’s management agreed to most of the protesters’s demands and it appeared that the strike is over. Nonetheless, confronted by representatives from other factories, Lech Wałęsa who led the workers, decided to prolong the protest. He declared “if they wanted it, the strike would continue, and now as a solidarity strike.”\footnote{Quoted in Ash, *The Polish Revolution*, 41.} Within a matter of days the dissent spread throughout most of industrial plants in northern Poland, turning into a massive demonstration directed against the government. The nation appeared to revive the collective spirit of June 1979 days.

Furthermore, a few hours after the decision to extend the protest has been made, the workers formed an Interfactory Strike Committee (MKS), which became the main instrument of negotiation with the Communist regime as well as the foundation brick of the Solidarity Movement. On the evening of 17 August, the MKS postulated its famous “21 demands.” Interestingly, the first five points of the ultimatum did not claim for higher wages or better benefits. Instead they demanded the right to free speech, acceptance of free trade unions along with a
right to strike, and restoration of prisoners repressed for their political views. A very curious arrangement in light of the Pope’s message, preached during his pilgrimage in Poland.

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Though John Paul II’s stay in Poland lasted for only nine days, the effects of his trip went beyond anyone’s expectations. Preaching to millions of his compatriots the Pope managed to spark a true social revolution. His dignified presence had a stimulating effect on the people’s thoughts and emotions. He mesmerized Poland with a message of vividness and authenticity that very few could resist. His words, so memorable and emphatic, caused reflection on the socio-political situation and the Party’s authority to rule. Moreover, exposing the fact that the government reacted passively, the papal visit may have led people to believe the state was no longer capable of violence or repression and inspired them with the power to act. John Paul II’s pilgrimage was a remarkable victory of adamant spirit over fickle artificiality. It was a display of great rhetorical talent combined with unparalleled charisma and equally unsurpassed intellect. The Pope stimulated a range of emotions so diverse and curious that the society did not stop living the event long after it was over.

In many ways the strikes that erupted in Gdańsk in August of 1980 represented a culmination of the feelings aroused by the papal pilgrimage. However, to say the event was primary reason for the protests and the rise of the

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102 Ash, The Polish Revolution, 43.
Solidarity Movement would be an oversimplification. What happened at the Lenin Shipyard was a result of a combination of factors, which was further accelerated by the June visit. The Pope merely awakened a potential that had long slumbered in Polish society. He provided the nation with a model of behavior, unyielding, courageous, yet peaceful, that echoed in the actions of the protesters. In the end the strikers won a victory over the Communist authorities. They achieved it with their dignity and adamancy, all the time being supported by a portrait of John Paul II attached to the shipyard’s fence.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources:


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