

FACE TO FACE. POPE JOHN PAUL II'S MEETINGS WITH POLISH AUTHORITIES, IN 1983

Gabriel Stelian MANEA *

Received: April 5th, 2025

Accepted for publication: May 7th, 2025

Abstract: Announced as a religious pilgrimage of Pope John Paul II to celebrate the 600th anniversary of the Pauline monastery Jasna Góra in Częstochowa, the Holy Father's second visit to his native Poland in June 1983 also provided the opportunity for several meetings with the political leaders of that time. The Holy See would have been happy to avoid such meetings or to limit them to a strictly protocol level to give the entire visit only religious connotations, but the Polish authorities insisted on formal meetings and discussions. They could not miss the chance to legitimize themselves in front of the whole world, especially in delicate moments for Poland, through a handshake full of implications with the Holy Father. These meetings, and especially those with Wojciech Jaruzelski, were carefully monitored, analyzed, and interpreted by the press and, especially, by the diplomats accredited in Poland. Among them, British and Romanian diplomats sent numerous and detailed diplomatic notes to their governments, which today make it possible to understand John Paul II's historic visit to Poland from yet another perspective.

Keywords: John Paul II; Wojciech Jaruzelski, Poland; communism; Great Britain; Romania

Introduction

The idea of the Holy Father's second visit to Poland was born in 1979, during his first arrival in his native country.¹ Then, without consulting the authorities, and taking them by surprise, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Primate of Poland, initiated a new visit, extending an invitation to John Paul II.² Therefore, the second visit to Poland, as Pope, was scheduled to take place in August 1982, to celebrate the 600th anniversary of the inauguration of the Pauline monastery

* Ovidius University of Constanța, Romania, gabrielstelianmanea@yahoo.com

¹ See Gabriel Stelian Manea, "The End of a Communist Imperial Illusion. The First Visit of Pope John Paul II in Poland. 1979" in Emanuel Ploeanu, Gabriel Stelian Manea, Metin Omer (eds.), *The Empire. Between Dispute and Nostalgia*, (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021).

² The Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bucharest – Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe (AMAE), *Fond 1983*, Polonia, Problem 210, File 1486.

Jasna Góra in Częstochowa, where the much-venerated icon of the Black Madonna is also located. It was a place that, according to the comparison of Timothy Garton Ash, an eyewitness to the events, represented for Poles both Westminster Abbey and Windsor Castle at the same time.³ However, the political situation in Poland was still volatile, and the proposed date coincided with the second anniversary of Solidarity, which caused the visit to be postponed, and the jubilee festivities to be extended for an entire year.

However, in the eyes of the authorities, the ceremonies at Jasna Góra were just a pretext, because, in reality, the Church would have pursued other, extra-religious objectives. In a document presented to the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP) in February 1983, this hypothesis was argued as follows: the purpose of the visit "will be to strengthen society's conviction about the possibility of continuing in Poland the changes started in 1980, of course, according to the Church's conception. The initiator expects the visit to deepen in the consciousness of the faithful the links with the social doctrine of the Church and to facilitate, perhaps, the influencing of forces that are moving away from the authorities, which would ensure the Church a certain influence in the political life of the country."⁴ And indeed, even though the visit was seen by the Holy Father as a religious pilgrimage, and the festivities at Jasna Góra were to be its central point, a certain political charge was bound to be present.

The first official announcement of the papal visit was released on November 8, 1982, following a meeting between the Catholic Primate of Poland, Cardinal Józef Glemp, and General Wojciech Jaruzelski. The definitive date of arrival was set for June 16, 1983, and the complete program of the visit was made public through a simultaneous communiqué in Warsaw and the Vatican on May 17, 1983.⁵ Moreover, the Polish authorities constantly invoked, in the months leading up to the visit, the fact that the Solidarity protests jeopardized its execution.⁶ From November 1982 until the summer of the following year, there were numerous moments when the visit was questioned for political or opportunity reasons, but starting with January 1983 it seemed certain since the Polish Episcopate conveyed, through a pastoral letter, that detailed organizational preparations had begun. It was the perfect opportunity

³ Timothy Garton Ash, *Foloasele prigoanei. Eseuri despre destinul Europei Centrale și de Est. Lanterna magică. Martor la revoluția din 89 la Varșovia, Budapesta, Berlin și Praga* (București: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1997), 52.

⁴ AMAE, *Fond 1983*, Polonia, Problem 210, File 1486.

⁵ Open Society Archives (OSA), *Radio Free Europe Background Report*, Poland on the Eve of Papal Visit: Itinerary, Preparations, First Leg, Munich, Jun. 14, 1983, 1.

⁶ "Polish threat," *The Times*, April 20, 1983.

for the official press in Warsaw to reject, once again, the Western speculations that the Holy Father's arrival in Poland was unlikely.⁷

The official invitation from the Polish authorities and the Episcopate was transmitted on March 22, 1983, signed by the President of the State Council, Henryk Jabłoński. Recalling the 1979 visit, at the end of which the late Primate Stefan Wyszyński had extended an invitation for John Paul II to participate in the 600th anniversary of the Black Madonna icon from Częstochowa, the Polish leader extended an invitation to His Holiness to visit his native country between June 16-22, 1983. The invitation also included hopes expressed by the head of state that the visit would have a favorable effect for the good of the country, the socialist state, for national harmony, and for the normalization of relations between state and Church. Jabłoński emphasized that the visit should promote efforts for peace and the prevention of the arms race.⁸

The visit to Poland of a Polish Pope was not just a pilgrimage to his native lands, but was part of a very important policy towards the East in the strategic order. However, there was no shortage of critics of this visit, from the Soviet news agency Tass to members of the Pope's entourage, but the Holy Father never considered canceling or postponing the visit, even when Poles were still waiting for confirmation from Moscow.⁹ Those who kept alive the memory of Pope John XXIII did not look favorably upon the visit, believing that discreet and patient dialogue was much more effective compared to John Paul II's approach, which was considered provocative. Canceling such a visit would have been a serious blow to the Vatican's Eastern policy. The invitation extended to Catholic leaders from other parts of Eastern Europe, such as Cardinal Lekai from Hungary, Cardinal Tomasek from Czechoslovakia, and Cardinal Vaivods from Latvia, to meet him in Poland, underlined the broader significance of the visit. During the time of the last two predecessors on the chair of St. Peter, Monsignor Agostino Casaroli, now Cardinal and Secretary of State at the Vatican, visited the communist states and sought to obtain, through negotiations, more room for maneuver for the Catholic Church. But while for the Italian popes Europe meant rather the West, John Paul II thinks in terms of the spiritual unity of all Christians.¹⁰

⁷ The National Archives (NA), Kew, *Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and predecessors*, file no. FCO 28/5633 A: Pope's Visit to Poland. Telegram of the British Embassy in Warsaw to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Jan. 31, 1983.

⁸ Ibid. p. 20.

⁹ Pope John Paul II was very determined about his foreign visits, some of them at delicate moments. In November 1979 he went to Turkey and met with the Patriarch of Constantinople, although the Turkish government made it clear that the visit was not convenient. In 1982 he went to Great Britain, although he had been advised not to do so in the context of the Falklands conflict.

¹⁰ Peter Nichols, "Polish Hopes, Vatican Fears," *The Times*, Jun. 11, 1983.

Moreover, from the British Embassy to the Holy See, the picture painted was even more interesting, depicting a Curia not at all united in ideas and strategy regarding the approach to the Communist East, and therefore also to Poland. Peter Nichols, the *Times* correspondent at the Vatican, described to the British ambassador a "state of war" between the Pope and Cardinal Casaroli, with the latter sidelined and with a real Polish "mafia" orchestrating and preparing a confrontation between the Church and communism. According to Nichols, the reason the Pope was going to Poland was not because he is Polish or because he insists on participating in the celebrations in Częstochowa, but because the Soviet authorities are content to ignore him when he speaks from Rome or elsewhere in the world, but it is quite different if he were to speak in a Slavonic language, right from the Soviet borders. The same Nichols had also had a meeting with Monsignor Capovilla, former secretary to Pope John XXIII, who believed that John Paul II's policy towards the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact states was one of confrontation and for this reason totally different from that of his predecessor. This transformation was the basis of the conflict with Cardinal Casaroli. Other cardinals of the Church also had a more accommodating view when it came to relations with communism, such as the late primate of Poland, Stefan Wyszyński or László Lékai from Hungary, but the ordinary citizens of these countries preferred John Paul II's approach. Peter Nichols was critical of the current Holy Father and his decision to follow the path of confrontation with communism, arguing that other high officials of the Curia were also ignored when it came to Poland or communist countries.

Pope John Paul II, however, did not come to Poland to maintain a dubious and unviable balance between state and Church, nor did he aim to preserve appearances of collaboration. How could the Holy Father protect an atheist regime that violently repressed the just aspirations of the Poles? He came to Poland on a pilgrimage and as a shepherd who visits his flock of believers, not just as a head of state, and for these reasons it was possible for the authorities to organize a program that would avoid as much as possible meeting with people or with Lech Wałęsa.¹¹ The same authorities, concerned and even worried about the prospect of the visit, were drafting, in February 1983, a document entitled "The political-organizational premises of the Pope's visit to Poland," intended for the Political Bureau of the CC of the PUWP. According to their estimates, the Holy Father, perfectly aware of the internal and international climate of the moment and feeling obliged to fulfill a moral duty assumed towards the Polish faithful, intended to go beyond the strictly religious aspects of the visit, precisely so as not to betray the hopes with which he was awaited and, according to the authors of the document, so as "not to lose his prestige in opposition circles." Furthermore, the party leadership speculated that even the high guest was facing a dilemma, that he did not intend

¹¹ "The Pope in Poland," *The Times*, Jun. 15, 1983.

for his presence in Poland to be used against the authorities, but neither did he want to contribute to the capital of trust in them. Therefore, the visit's agenda should have included meetings with state officials at a minimum protocol level.¹²

The British Embassy estimated, on June 6, that it was quite unlikely that the Pope would deliberately say anything provocative or attack government policies, although he could have alluded to them. In addition, the impact on the young clergy, who were to define the Church's relationship with the state in the years to come, was important.¹³

Hopes and worries

Pope John Paul II was animated by at least four major objectives in his pontificate: strengthening and protecting the autonomy of the Church; respect for human dignity; religious commitment and relationship with political authorities in different countries; concern for social, economic and political justice.¹⁴ None of these objectives were forgotten or ignored during the 1983 visit to Poland.

On the other hand, the Church's expectations from the event were probed by British diplomats from Bishop Jerzy Dąbrowski, the special advisor to Primate Glemp, during a meeting with the British ambassador to Warsaw, on March 10, 1983. Surprisingly, the Catholic prelate had in mind a political and democratic objective, aimed at allowing the election, and not the appointment, of political and administrative authorities at the local level. Bishop Jerzy Dąbrowski started from the idea that the papal visit could encourage those elements within the PUWP who accepted that there could be another source of political initiative, outside the party, and who could contribute to the general good. He wondered if the idea of governing an entire country solely on the basis of everyone's loyalty to party doctrine and not on the basis of each individual's proven abilities was a terrible source of weakness and even a self-inflicted disaster. He even stated that he had submitted a document to the Sejm arguing that at the local level, advisory councils should reflect the wishes of the people they represent, in other words, be freely elected and not thrown at the population by the party apparatus. Of course, he did not expect Poland or other Eastern European countries to develop democratic institutions on the Western model, but he hoped to encourage at least a minimal distancing from the suffocating thesis that loyalty to the party should be the key factor in governing

¹² AMAE, *Fond 1983*, Polonia, Problem 210, File 1486.

¹³ NA, *Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and predecessors*, file no. FCO 28/5633 A: Pope's Visit to Poland. Telegram of the British Embassy in Warsaw to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Jun. 6, 1983, 37.

¹⁴ Jo Renee Formicola, "The Political Legacy of Pope John Paul II," *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (spring 2005), 235.

the country. He rejected, on the other hand, the idea of a Christian-democratic party in Poland, but hoped for a minimal shift from the party nomenclature model.

The Episcopate, in turn, under the leadership of Primate Glemp, pronounced itself, evidently and decisively, in favor of the visit, but emphasized to the authorities that it did not lose sight of the complexity of the socio-political conditions at that moment. The complexity came from the fact that the Church enjoyed considerable support among Poles, which was comforting for the Episcopate, but also made it responsible because the emotional and perhaps unpredictable manifestations of the faithful could generate responses from the authorities, on the one hand, and from opposition circles on the other. In addition to all this, Cardinal Glemp was also concerned about the possible reverberations that could reach other socialist countries.¹⁵ Therefore, the leadership of the Polish Church emphasized the strictly religious character of the visit, with an important contribution to the regulation of the internal social and political situation.

On the authorities' side, they were more concerned about the consequences of the visit, not necessarily about its execution. In general, they were marked by a feeling of concern which they did not hesitate to express within the government, at various levels of party leadership, in diplomatic circles, and even publicly, in the press. Months of analyses and debates regarding the effects of the visit had even divided the Political Bureau, in which two currents of opinion seemed irreconcilable. Firstly, there were those, grouped around Kazimierz Barcikowski, who believed there was a minimal chance that the visit might alleviate some of the tension of the internal confrontation and, further, modify the West's attitude towards Poland. The second group, with Mirosław Milewski as its spokesperson, predicted exclusively negative effects and therefore insisted on a strategy to control the inevitable damage. So harsh had this dispute between the two groups become that it was speculated that it had caused Barcikowski a heart attack because the negative opinion had prevailed, being adopted by the Party leadership and the government.¹⁶

There were observers who wondered why General Jaruzelski accepted this second papal visit, a visit that promised only to strengthen the Church and provide a new impetus to Solidarity, while the communist regime had to assume the risks and political uncertainty. The Polish leadership had no solution to refuse the visit and recognized this dilemma when organizing meetings with diplomats from socialist states to keep them up to date with internal developments. At such a meeting, on March 1, 1983, Kazimierz Barcikowski, a member of the Political Bureau, ruled out the possibility of a refusal without

¹⁵ AMAE, *Fond 1983*, Polonia, Problem 210, file 1486.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 181.

Poland exposing itself to "great political damage"¹⁷ internally and externally. Among some of the British diplomats in Warsaw, questions persisted about the reasons why the Polish Government was taking such risks, many of them related to the content of the pontifical speeches, others related to the mere presence of the Holy Father among ecstatic crowds, which, later, could have threatening reverberations for the regime, as had happened in 1979. In addition, the Czechoslovak and East German neighbors considered the Polish authorities downright crazy if they allowed Poles to be exposed again to the "subversive influence of papal charisma." A Czechoslovak diplomat had expressed in the entourage of a British colleague that the visit was "very unwise."¹⁸ The British also appreciated that the government could not refuse the visit without risking massive criticism and image damage, but hoped to obtain minimal advantages. The Pope's arrival could not be postponed indefinitely, and the government decided to proceed in 1983 rather than later.¹⁹

Carefully analyzing the entire Polish context of those years, the British embassy in Warsaw tried to explain to the Foreign Office that if the visit had not taken place, regardless of the reason, the government would have been held responsible. Moreover, preventing the visit by the government would have given the Poles new reasons for dissatisfaction and would have shown the world that the internal situation in Poland was still precarious and unstable, despite claims of normalization. Even if the decision not to come had belonged to the Holy Father, on the grounds that repression was still high, the Polish authorities would still have had to manage this image disaster. Under these conditions, the government could hope for small compensations, brief moments of glory when the Pope would meet with Jaruzelski and other authorities.²⁰

The economic crisis was an important component of the equation, and no planned reform addressed the most sensitive problems: decades of neglect of agriculture, harmful investments, bureaucratic centralism, and foreign debt. The party and government bureaucracy postponed any kind of reform in these sectors, and Jaruzelski hoped that the Pope's visit would produce a diplomatic opening followed by an economic one, the lifting of Western sanctions and credits. However, John Paul II had expressed himself vaguely in this direction, and would do so during the visit, saying only that he wanted good cooperation between Poland and Western countries and America, where many Poles lived.²¹

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ NA, *Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and predecessors*, file no. FCO 28/5633 A: Pope's Visit to Poland. Telegram of the British Embassy in Warsaw to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Mar. 4, 1983, 13.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ash, *Foloasele prigoanei*, 61.

But from these statements, the lifting of martial law by Jaruzelski followed by the lifting of sanctions by President Reagan, or vice versa, could not result.

In the document entitled "The political-organizational premises of the Pope's visit to Poland," from February 1983, the Political Bureau of the Party already seemed resigned that the visit could not bring anything good to the regime, so all it could do was "reduce to a minimum the negative effects of the visit and use it, as far as possible, in the interest of the internal and external policy of the Polish People's Republic." The tone was downright worried throughout the document, the authors estimating that, despite official statements and even an agreement agreed by the parties, the Pope's presence could not be just a religious gesture, but a moment with a terrible political charge. The internal and international context were so complicated that at the level of the PUWP leadership there was no possibility of obtaining "advantages for the problem. Also, we cannot expect immediate advantages on this occasion, such as: new loans, easing of sanctions, change in debt payment conditions."²² Therefore, during the meeting of the Political Bureau, a long inventory of "certain dangers in the political, social, and ideological spheres" was drawn up, dangers that could extend to Poland's neighbors and allies. However, the Party and the Government had to make every effort to minimize the "harmful content and area of influence" of the phenomena. Specifically, the following aspects were worrying:

- "the preparation and execution of the visit may provoke various assessments among party members, hindering the party consolidation process.
- The arrival and behavior of the Pope may activate many circles of society in favor of Solidarity. This would weaken the political consolidation of society on the foundation of the socialist system.
- During the visit, the Pope may engage in formulating a program to consolidate the anti-socialist opposition.
- - The content of the Pope's speeches may inspire hostile political manifestations.
- The Pope's separate meetings with school youth, students, and other youth groups may deepen extremist moods and provoke political manifestations, leading to breaches of public order and peace.
- The Pope may use the visit to Poland to consolidate religious feelings among Catholics in socialist countries and also for attempts to destabilize the socio-political situation in these states, through messianic intrigues (sic!) in his speeches.
- In various circles hostile to People's Poland, the visit may be used as a test of the durability of our system and the current authorities.

²² AMAE, *Fond 1983*, Polonia, Problem 210, file 1486.

- The opposition may use the Pope's presence and religious gatherings for provocative actions, hindering the process of stabilizing the situation in the country.
- The Church may amplify, in religious activities, the emphasis on the alleged problem of human and citizen rights, of society, as being threatened by the "totalitarian" authorities and state.
- The visit and the associated increase in the Church's prestige may deepen, in the conviction of society, the fact that it is the main exponent of the people's aspirations."²³

On the other hand, the possible advantages of the event were much fewer, uncertain and formulated in a very general manner and, moreover, they had to be "secured in negotiations with the Church," thus being beyond any official control. These positive effects had to be confirmed by the course of the visit, to demonstrate that "socialist renewal is treated responsibly"; "the openness towards the Church is consistent"; "the Church functions in socialist realities" and does not support opposition elements. Here is the inventory drawn up here:

- "greater confidence in the intentions and actions of the authorities;
- Demonstration, before society and world public opinion, of the durability of our socialist system;
- A certain improvement in the climate in the West towards the initiatives of the Polish People's Republic;
- The Church's abandonment of the public manifestation of its relations with the anti-socialist opposition, as well as of actions and religious services of a hostile nature, against the state and its leadership;
- Amplification, in church activity, of positive accents, indicating the desire to collaborate with the authorities in preparing the visit, which could have positive effects on mutual relations.
- Increased participation of the Church for the benefit of strengthening order, social peace, respect for legality and moral principles, and employment."²⁴

What will the Pope say?

The Pope knew very well that what he said in an Eastern country, close to the Soviet border and in the middle of the Soviet empire, would be analyzed and weighed much more carefully than what he declared in St. Peter's Square. The first Slavic Pope to speak to the Slavs in their language and on their territory would be listened to with much more attention. Thus, his messages were addressed more to Moscow when he spoke about the restrictions to which

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Catholics in Czechoslovakia were subjected, about the repression in the Baltic States or about the need for flexibility in Hungary. In addition, the Holy Father's intentions also concerned the relationship with the Eastern Orthodox Churches, of which the Russian one was the largest.²⁵

The authorities were downright obsessed, in the months leading up to the visit and in the negotiations regarding the organization, to know in advance the content of the pontifical speeches, but they were met with an absolute refusal from the Church. As early as mid-February 1983, various party officials were showing nervousness and wanted to know what political attitude the Pope intended to adopt, so that it could be brought to their attention before the visit.²⁶ Even in the joint government-episcopate commission that was organizing the event, official requests were made for the text of the papal sermons and speeches to be submitted to the authorities, but these were refused because the Church argued that they had a strictly religious content.²⁷ Later, at the beginning of May, in a press conference of the Minister of Religious Affairs, Adam Lopatka, he specified that the government expected to be notified in advance regarding the Pope's speeches upon arrival, departure, and at meetings with the authorities, according to international customs, and had no interest in the content of the sermons and other speeches that the Holy Father would make during religious celebrations.²⁸ But even this request was not acceptable to the Church, as confirmed by Bishop Jerzy Dąbrowski, the special advisor to the primate, in a discussion with the British ambassador to Poland on May 18, adding that the Church was more amused than irritated by this insistence of the authorities.²⁹ When Archbishop Achille Silvestrini, a prestigious Vatican diplomat, traveled to Warsaw between May 30 and June 1 for the final details of the visit, the issue of the texts of the pontifical speeches was not at all resolved, the high prelate being authorized to transmit to the hosts only a few general lines, and not the full text.³⁰ At that time, the only concession seemed to be the one related to the communiqué released to the public after the scheduled meeting between John Paul II, General Jaruzelski, and Henryk Jabłoński. The Polish leaders wanted to co-opt the Holy Father into their nuclear disarmament

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 1-2.

²⁷ Ibid., f. 2.

²⁸ NA, *Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and predecessors*, file no. FCO 28/5633 A: Pope's Visit to Poland. Telegram of the British Embassy in Warsaw to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, May 4, 1983, 28.

²⁹ NA, *Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and predecessors*, file no. FCO 28/5633 A: Pope's Visit to Poland. Telegram of the British Embassy in Warsaw to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, May 19, 1983, 34.

³⁰ Ibid, 36.

campaign and would have liked the subject to appear in the communiqué.³¹ Also, when Cardinal Józef Glemp, Primate of Poland, was in the Vatican at the beginning of June, he confessed to some diplomats, with some concern, that he knew nothing of the content of the approximately 30 speeches that the Holy Father was to give. Most were religious, but the primate of Poland feared that they would not be exactly moderate, as he would have hoped.³² At the Vatican, however, a week before the start of the visit, Archbishop Martínez Somalo, receiving the British ambassador, conveyed to him that the greatest concern of the Polish authorities was that the Pope was to criticize their political line and the Soviet Union. Therefore, they dared to ask him to avoid such remarks, and even to introduce into his speeches some elements of appreciation for the government. In addition, he added that the Pope could not avoid the topic of human rights, but that he was to refer to it on a religious basis.³³

In this direction, the Polish government was determined to take concrete measures to limit the risk or at least the consequences of any political statements by John Paul II that would have affected the regime. There was talk, in party leadership circles and in the government, about influencing the political position of the Holy Father through the Polish Episcopate, a strategy that had little chance of success even in the opinion of the authors, given that the Pope was not obliged to take into account the suggestions of the Episcopate, which, anyway, depended on the Holy See. Secondly, Józef Czyrek, a member of the Political Bureau, traveled to the Vatican at the end of February with the mission to discuss the fundamental issues of the visit. His hopes were tied to a possible intervention by Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, the Secretary of State of the Holy See, known for his prudence and ability to maintain open dialogue with communist states. Finally, there was reliance on influencing John Paul II's position through close people, but capable of taking into account the interests of the Polish government. With all these strategies and variants, it was officially recognized that the pontifical discourse could not be controlled. 'We know the Pope well – said Kazimierz Barcikowski, a member of the Political Bureau, on February 28, 1983, in front of diplomats from socialist countries – and we know that he is capable of being carried away by emotions, being also a great actor, we also expect the possibility of him making uncontrolled statements.'³⁴

³¹ NA, *Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and predecessors*, file no. FCO 28/5633 A: Pope's Visit to Poland. Telegram of the British Embassy in Warsaw to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Jun. 9, 1983, 41.

³² NA, *Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and predecessors*, file no. FCO 28/5633 A: Pope's Visit to Poland. Telegram of the British Embassy in Vatican to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Jun. 3, 1983, 39.

³³ The National Archives, Kew, *Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and predecessors*, file no. FCO 28/5633 A: Pope's Visit to Poland. Telegram of the British Embassy in Vatican to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Jun. 13, 1983, 54.

³⁴ AMAE, *Fond 1983*, Polonia, Problem 210, file 1486, 5.

In the end, the government was forced to accept the Church's assurances that the Pope was not coming to start an insurrection and was perfectly aware of the weight his words could have on the audience. Therefore, it could be trusted that he would speak prudently.³⁵

When it became evident that these strategies were failing, the authorities insisted that John Paul II at least include in his sermons or public speeches some nuances or even specific themes of official propaganda. According to a director from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, just three weeks before the visit, the government's requests were aimed at including in the papal speeches, 'in a positive spirit, favorable to Poland,' three important themes: disarmament, West German revanchism due to revisionist statements from Bonn, and the sanctions adopted by the West against Poland.³⁶ The topic was resumed in more detail during the discreet visit of Archbishop Achille Silvestrini, from May 30 to June 1, 1983, who met with Stefan Olszowski, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wojciech Jaruzelski, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, and Henryk Jabłoński, Chairman of the State Council. The discussions with Olszowski, the most applied, also had polemical moments. The head of Polish diplomacy insisted that through his speeches, the Pope should not jeopardize Poland's relations with the USSR and other socialist states, understand the imperatives of Polish state reason, and added that the Catholic Church is responsible for the conduct of the visit, and its relations with the government will be affected by the very content of the papal speeches and the results of the visit. In addition, he suggested to Archbishop Silvestrini that the Holy Father's public interventions include references to the issues of peace and disarmament, West German revanchism, and economic sanctions against Poland imposed by the United States and its allies. The pontifical diplomat's response only partially satisfied the Polish side. Regarding peace and disarmament, he gave assurances that the Holy Father would follow the line of his speech at the UN in 1979, when he spoke in favor of negotiations on reducing the level of armaments, with guarantees for the participants in the negotiations. On the issue of West German revanchism, Silvestrini limited himself to stating that the Holy See expresses understanding for the priorities of Polish policy, the proof being the Pope's decision in 1980 to introduce Polish church administration in all Catholic dioceses in the West of the country.³⁷ Regarding the issue of anti-

³⁵ NA, *Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and predecessors*, file no. FCO 28/5633 A: Pope's Visit to Poland. Telegram of the British Embassy in Warsaw to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, March 4, 1983.

³⁶ AMAE, *Fond 1983*, Polonia, Problem 210, file 1486, 129.

³⁷ Until the 1980 decision, the dioceses in Western Poland were administratively integrated into other German dioceses, led by German bishops. After 1980, Polish bishops were appointed to lead them. However, the situation was not always like this. In the 1950s, when relations between Church and State were extremely tense, the Church was even accused of not recognizing the country's western borders because the Episcopate refrained from

Polish sanctions, he did not give assurances that the Pope would take a public stance against them, but limited himself to mentioning that the Apostolic See understands that these sanctions affect the living standards of Poles. Finally, Silvestrini also pointed out that although there are differences of opinion regarding the internal situation in Poland, Pope John Paul II will not question the foundations of the state regime. In the same vein, he will not jeopardize the country's external relations, the relationship with the USSR, although he was interested in a more consistent dialogue with socialist countries on the issue of religious freedom.³⁸

An uncertain visit

At the time of the visit, Jaruzelski's government situation was somewhat paradoxical. It was, at the same time, a very strong and very weak government.³⁹ Strong because it held the monopoly of physical force, which it did not hesitate to use (Jaruzelski was the first party leader after 1956 who shot Polish workers) and to transform into a legal instrument by imposing martial law. At the other pole, the government's weakness came from the inability to find a way out of a perpetual crisis.

General Jaruzelski had proven incapable of restoring economic and social stability. Economic production was declining, as was the standard of living. The number of those demonstrating in support of Solidarity, although very consistent, was only the tip of an iceberg of social discontent. However, Jaruzelski claimed that Poland was on the path to normalization and showed no signs of wanting to reach a compromise with Lech Wałęsa and other moderate representatives of Polish society. Thousands of people left the party and a new government-backed trade union to be an alternative to Solidarity failed to gather even the number of members of the former official unions. It could not compare with Solidarity, which had about ten million members before it was banned. The refusal to discuss with moderates like Wałęsa created the risk of escalating violence and worsening the economic crisis.⁴⁰

In January 1983, the visit seemed to be conditioned by two requests from the Pope, which were expressed through the Polish Episcopate, namely an amnesty for prisoners imprisoned for political reasons and a lifting of the state

appointing bishops in the acquired territories. The theme was also used by the authorities for a perverse unspoken purpose, that of sowing discord between the Polish bishops and the Vatican, the latter being unable to remove the German bishops after a centuries-old tradition, but also between the Episcopate and ordinary Poles who were in favor of the Oder-Neisse line. Ion Constantin, *Polonia în secolul totalitarismelor 1918-1989* (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2007), 402-403.

³⁸ AMAE, *Fond 1983*, Polonia, Problem 210, file 1487, 155-157.

³⁹ Ash, *Foloasele prigoanei*, 60.

⁴⁰ "Poland's Lamp of Liberty," *The Times*, May 4, 1983.

of war. The Episcopate had even included this request in a pastoral letter distributed throughout the country, arguing that it depended on creating a favorable atmosphere for the arrival of John Paul II. In return, the total lifting of martial law was not included in this appeal.⁴¹

In parallel, at the Vatican, the Pope publicly supported workers' rights and, although he did not directly name Poland, he appealed for "solidarity, fraternity and freedom." In a message sent to the Holy Father, the clandestine leaders of Solidarity condemned the regime's violence and argued that their movement was a "spiritual revolution" that wanted to transform Poland into a stable, democratic country where human and national dignity are not violated.

A report from the British Embassy in Warsaw, from the beginning of March, estimated that even after the authorities and the Church had agreed on the arrival date of the Holy Father, the visit was not exactly certain, and the uncertainty came from papal circles. John Paul II wondered if it was appropriate to visit his native Poland in conditions where martial law was only suspended and there were no signs of an amnesty for political detainees.⁴²

Also in March, British diplomats had learned, through a Dutch intermediary, the opinion that prevailed at the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, namely that martial law could not be completely lifted before the papal visit, on the one hand because it would be too obvious a concession on Poland's part, inconsistent with its national dignity, and on the other hand because the authorities would have been deprived of an important instrument in case the situation deteriorated. Instead, if the entire event were to unfold smoothly and without incidents, it could be an argument for a future lifting of martial law. Also, there could be no question of a general amnesty, but only of an increase in the number of those released.⁴³

On top of all this, there was an official request from the Pope to the Polish authorities, formulated in the very letter in which he accepted the invitation to visit the country for the second time, namely that of a general amnesty for political detainees.⁴⁴ Specifically, on April 21, 1983, the Pope responded to the official letter by which he was invited to Poland, and a fragment of this response was worrying, requesting that by the time of his arrival all those convicted under the laws relating to the declaration of the state of war be released. Taken by surprise, the Polish government intervened at the Holy See to prevent the letter from being published, as was natural, at least until receiving a response from the President of the State Council. Even so, the

⁴¹ Hella Pick, "Pope to Visit Poland in June," *The Guardian*, Jan. 31, 1983.

⁴² NA, *Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and predecessors*, file no. FCO 28/5633 A: Pope's Visit to Poland. Telegram of the British Embassy in Warsaw to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, March 4, 1983, 13.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ "Poland's Lamp of Liberty," *The Times*, May 4, 1983.

Reuters news agency came into possession of information from the Vatican, and foreign journalists in Poland insisted on an official confirmation. Furthermore, Warsaw insisted on knowing whether the Vatican considered this a fundamental condition for the conduct of the visit and specified that such a request could not be met. At most, it was suggested that the Pope make a request to this effect during the visit. The reply letter, signed by Henryk Jabłoński, suggested that if the Holy Father wanted to refer to political issues, he should do so about the danger of war, the inviolability of borders, the sanctions imposed on Poland, all favorite themes of propaganda.⁴⁵ In the end, neither of the letters was made public⁴⁶, but this exchange of replies produced even more tension. Only in a press conference on May 4 did the Minister of Religious Affairs, Adam Lopatka, admit that John Paul II's letter included a reference to a general amnesty, but added that it was more of a request than a condition for the visit.⁴⁷

The meeting at the Bełwedere Palace, June 17, 1983

In preparation for the visit, starting as early as November 1982, a joint commission, made up of representatives of the Polish Government and the Episcopate, worked through several sessions to prepare the details, especially the delicate ones, such as the itinerary, the topics addressed in speeches and sermons, as well as the meeting of the Holy Father with the authorities. In this last regard, the idea, proposed by the Vatican, was that the visit should be only a religious one, a pilgrimage as it was called, which was not at all to the liking of the authorities. The latter insisted on a political meeting with the regime leaders and not just a formal, protocol one, which would have been relegated to the background, as can be seen from the explanations offered by Kazimierz Barcikowski, a member of the Political Bureau, in front of diplomats from socialist countries.⁴⁸

Even in the negotiation stages of the visit, around March, British diplomacy was gathering information regarding the possible meetings of the Pope with the authorities during the 1983 visit. The special advisor to Primate Glemp, Bishop Jerzy Dąbrowski, conveyed to a diplomat from the British Embassy that meetings with the authorities would certainly take place, especially with Jaruzelski, following the model of the 1979 visit. He admitted, however, that images of a handshake between John Paul II and Jaruzelski could cause disappointment and pain among Poles, but found circumstances in the recent

⁴⁵ AMAE, *Fond 1983*, Polonia, Problem 210, file 1487, 74.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁴⁷ NA, *Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and predecessors*, file no. FCO 28/5633 A: Pope's Visit to Poland. Telegram of the British Embassy in Warsaw to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, May 4, 1983, 28.

⁴⁸ AMAE, *Fond 1983*, Polonia, Problem 210, file 1486.

meetings of the Holy Father with leaders from South America.⁴⁹ This idea was resumed, in much harsher terms, at a meeting of Bishop Dąbrowski, who simply called those who opposed a meeting with Jaruzelski "fools," arguing that "if the Pope stayed at home to spare their feelings, then it would be an admission that there was no hope of making any changes in the communist world."⁵⁰

The first direct contact with the Polish authorities was, of course, the one occasioned by the arrival ceremony of the Holy Father, on June 16, 1983, at the "Okęcie" military airport in Warsaw, where he was welcomed by Henryk Jabłoński, Chairman of the State Council, Józef Czyrek, member of the Political Bureau and secretary of the CC of PUWP, Stefan Olszowski, member of the Political Bureau of the CC of PUWP and Minister of Foreign Affairs, as well as other Polish officials. From the Episcopate, Cardinal Józef Glemp, the primate of Poland, Cardinal Franciszek Macharski of Krakow, and Polish or foreign bishops who came to welcome him were present.

The arrival ceremony followed the pattern of a visit by a head of state, including the intonation of hymns and short speeches, the first of which belonged to Henryk Jabłoński. Among the ideas highlighted by the head of state, the most important was that of peace, a favorite of communist propaganda, calling the Pope a "messenger of peace," a continuator of John XXIII and Paul VI. In his opinion, the theme was all the more important in Poland, which had known the horrors of war and, therefore, promoted "understanding and progress for all." Touching on the issue of the internal situation, Jabłoński did not go into details, but stressed that the government's efforts were directed towards "caring for its own state, its independence and sovereignty," and the reforms carried out or planned were aimed at "the well-being and happiness of every family." In this sense, he did not forget to request the support of the Holy Father, because on these bases and intentions, in his opinion, the relationship between state and Church was founded.⁵¹

In the response address, the Holy Father thanked for the welcome and emphasized that his arrival in Poland was not only a personal desire, but especially a duty to the Polish people in "these difficult times," referring, without saying it directly, to the crisis of martial law and the state of war. From the first gestures and words, the Pope expressed his love and even veneration for Poland, and by kissing the native land, he was, in fact, kissing "the hand of

⁴⁹ NA, *Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and predecessors*, file no. FCO 28/5633 A: Pope's Visit to Poland. Telegram of the British Embassy in Warsaw to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Mar. 10, 1983, 14.

⁵⁰ NA, *Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and predecessors*, file no. FCO 28/5633 A: Pope's Visit to Poland. Telegram of the British Embassy in Warsaw to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Mar. 11, 1983, 17.

⁵¹ AMAE, *Fond 1983*, Polonia, Problem 210, file 1487, 201.

mother Poland," adding that after centuries of suffering, the country is suffering again at present. Although the main purpose of the visit was a religious one, participating in the pilgrimage to Jasna Góra, John Paul II said that he had returned to his native country to think "about the problems of the people, about the problems of Poland," "especially about those who suffer, are in prisons," regretting that he did not have the possibility to visit them all.⁵² The part of the address that provoked the most intense ovations was when John Paul II said that he would not be able to visit all those who were sick, imprisoned or suffering, but asked them to be close to him in spirit and to pray for him, as he felt they always did. He added that he had received many letters to this effect in recent times, which was interpreted by the crowd as a reference to those imprisoned under martial law. Huge crowds of Poles, lined up on the streets of Warsaw, were able to listen to these first remarks of the Holy Father on loudspeakers placed by the authorities, and one of the British diplomats who was watching the events even saw a Solidarity banner.⁵³

It should also be noted, after this first contact with representatives of the Polish authorities, that the Pope's speech was loudly applauded by the thousands of people present to welcome him, while Professor Jabłoński's speech was almost ignored, as reported by the Romanian Embassy in Poland.

As we have shown, the authorities had clear expectations from the Pope's visit and from the meetings with him, and most of these expectations revolved around an issue of authority and legitimacy. The communist leaders of Poland had considerable power, but they did not have the authority and legitimacy, their right to rule was not unanimously recognized either at home or abroad. They hoped, therefore, that the Pope, by meeting with the highest officials of the government and party, would provide them with at least a trace of respect, which would have facilitated their act of governing over a rather rebellious population and would have offered them a modest acceptance among Western states. The Pope had two meetings with the political leaders of the country. A formal meeting with some government representatives, on June 17, which included an exchange of official statements on the situation in the country and which was followed by a discussion of about two hours with General Jaruzelski. The second meeting, also with Jaruzelski, had not been planned, but took place on June 22. Both were widely publicized by the regime-controlled press.

General Jaruzelski remained, to some extent, an enigmatic figure, whose intentions and motives were difficult to understand even by Poles, even by

⁵² Ibid., 202-203.

⁵³ NA, *Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and predecessors*, file no. FCO 28/5633 A: Pope's Visit to Poland. Telegram of the British Embassy in Warsaw to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Jun. 17, 1983, 46.

contemporaries.⁵⁴ Even some active members of the opposition admitted that his intentions were of a completely different nature – in a good sense – than those of his predecessors. In his speech at the Belvedere Palace, he spoke in Polish, not in a translated Soviet wooden language; the obligatory reference to Polish-Soviet friendship was, rather, an allusion; he did not make a single reference to the Communist Party. However, he insisted and made it with aplomb that a strong state is needed, a state that reforms through laws, laws that do not punish free opinions, but only anti-state actions that violate the constitution. Even accepting that his intentions were good, the opposition and the pressures he had to face were major. Within the Party, Stefan Olszowski vehemently opposed the papal visit, being the voice of a stubborn conservative faction and the bureaucratic apparatus of the party-state that felt threatened by any reform. Hence the constant rumors of General Jaruzelski's dismissal.

It is somewhat anecdotal that a few weeks after the meeting with the Holy Father, Jaruzelski was awarded the "Order of Lenin" for services to socialism, by the Soviets.⁵⁵ We do not know if this can also be one of the miracles attributed to John Paul II, but it certainly added even more uncertainty regarding the personality, aspirations, and political intentions of the general. In front of the press, he stated that he was not interested in being popular among Poles, "we do not discuss things in such categories," but he wanted "this people should have confidence in the authority that I represent."⁵⁶

The question has often been asked how Jaruzelski managed to survive politically the martial law, given that two previous Polish leaders had been removed precisely because they allowed such tensions to accumulate in society that the security forces had to open fire on civilians. The same thing happened during the general's time, but he remained the undisputed leader of Poland. The explanations are multiple, different, complicated, and sometimes contradictory. Officially, the idea was argued and propagandistically transmitted that martial law prevented a civil war and more bloodshed, which could not be acceptable to Poles. On the other hand, some paid attention to the decision to rehabilitate, on his deathbed, Władysław Gomułka. Why would General Jaruzelski rehabilitate one who, in December 1970, had ordered the opening of fire against workers in the Baltic ports? The decision could further antagonize Polish society, already tense to the limit. But it was not that Gomułka from 1970 who was rehabilitated, but the one who had been in 1956, who still represented a model for many in the Polish party and state apparatus. They remembered a Polish road to socialism proposed by Gomułka, the cessation of terror, the fragile explorations of economic reforms, the attempt to reach a *modus vivendi* with the Church, the guarantee of private property in

⁵⁴ Ash, *Foloasele prigoanei*, 60.

⁵⁵ Roger Boyes, "Now for Jaruzelski's Real Test," *The Times*, Jul. 28, 1983.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

agriculture, cultural freedom.⁵⁷ Although many of these were abandoned or diluted even by Gomulka, they remained a kind of program even for General Jaruzelski.

Even the Americans encountered problems in trying to decipher him. He could be a Soviet puppet ("a Russian in Polish uniform") or, on the contrary, a Pole animated by good intentions, but who could not cope with Soviet pressures except with repressive measures in his own country. For young Poles, he was the one who killed Solidarity, but for many other Poles, he was the one who had kept his promise and lifted martial law. He remained to prove to them that he was trustworthy in terms of economic success or personal freedom. His speeches showed that he did not lack intelligence and had become increasingly refined over time. He had abandoned party phraseology and managed to comment skillfully on the intimate feeling of the Polish nation; he adopted a rhetoric adapted to young audiences; he managed to capture even the attention of the most bored.

With this Polish leader, Pope John Paul II was to meet. Therefore, the second day of the visit, June 17, 1983, also included the meeting with the communist authorities, Wojciech Jaruzelski, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, and Henryk Jabłoński, Chairman of the State Council⁵⁸, held at the Belvedere Palace.⁵⁹ On the way to the government building, although somewhat isolated in the armored "Popemobile," John Paul II was greeted by a crowd of believers, carrying thousands of banners with slogans such as: "The Pope is with us," "Solidarity," "The world sees us," "We want Lech."⁶⁰ The official version of the discussions was presented to the ambassadors of the socialist countries on the very day of June 17, by two members of the Political Bureau of the PUWP, Mirosław Milewski and Józef Czyrek, at a meeting convened at the Central Committee, and their characterization of the talks was that of "brutal sincerity" in expressing positions. Starting from the internal political realities, which he considered immutable, Jaruzelski was blunt in saying that Poland did not intend to create bridges between East and West, "but we will continue to base our relations on the foundation of cooperation with the countries of the socialist community, to which we remain bound," which meant, among other things, that internal reconciliation was to be achieved only with those who

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ "Convorbiri la Varşovia," *Scînteia*, Jun. 18, 1983.

⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that the Belvedere Palace was a true symbol of Polish resistance against the Russians. In the first decades of the 19th century, immediately after its construction, the palace had been used as a residence for the Tsar's brother, Grand Duke Constantine, but during the Polish revolt of 1831 it was attacked, and he was forced to flee. OSA, *Radio Free Europe Background Report*, Poland on the Eve of Papal Visit: Itinerary, Preparations, *First Leg*, Munich, Jun. 14, 1983, 10.

⁶⁰ Constantin, *Polonia*, 518.

respect "the reasons of the socialist state." The communist leader defended his decision to introduce the state of war, "the least of all the evils to which the adversaries were pushing," the authorities being obliged to this approach by the actions of the opposition, which should have been held responsible for the current state of affairs. In this context, in the general's opinion, the dissolution of "Solidarity" did not mean the dissolution of a trade union, but of a real opposition political party, its place being taken by another trade union movement and a "patriotic movement of national rebirth" which included those who "pronounce themselves for respecting the constitution of the People's Republic of Poland and take into account the state reasons of Poland," but which the Church in Poland and the Vatican ignored. Moreover, the Church was guilty of an attitude at least biased when it divided believers into those who supported the party and the regime and those who opposed them. Jaruzelski also referred to Western economic aid, accusing that Poland was not responsible for breaking trade relations with the West and adding that, at least since the introduction of martial law, Poland's survival was due to Soviet aid and that of other socialist countries, which is why this was the way to go, to consolidate cooperation with the latter. On the issue of those arrested or convicted during the state of war, Jaruzelski justified that their number was infinitesimal, about 200, in a population of 36 million, and in addition, "no one has been and is condemned for their beliefs, but only and only for breaking the law."⁶¹

During this meeting, Jaruzelski, visibly emotional, as he later admitted, tense and even nervous, tried to explain that the authorities were really forced to impose martial law in December 1981 to avoid "the enormity of public suffering and tears" that would have resulted from an alleged confrontation between supporters and opponents of the communist government. He did not detail too clearly what such a confrontation would have meant and whom it would have opposed, but, instead, he insisted on the moral dimension of the socialist state and emphasized that the authorities were determined to continue reforms regarding the functioning of the system, which would strengthen its socialist character.⁶²

The main themes of Jaruzelski's speech, during which he visibly trembled, were Poland's sovereignty and border integrity, the danger of war, and the internal situation. He emphasized that Poland had risen after the war as an independent state, reborn in a new and just territorial configuration. Already the third generation of children had been born in the Polish cities of Gdańsk, Wrocław, or Szczecin. After referring to the horrors of World War II, he reiterated that Poland's external security is based on a real alliance and not a

⁶¹ AMAE, *Fond 1983*, Polonia, Problem 210, File 1487, 207-210.

⁶² OSA, *Radio Free Europe Background Report/158*, J.B. Weydenthal, The Pope's Pilgrimage to Poland, Jul. 8, 1983.

square centimeter of Polish territory can be disputed.⁶³ Suggesting that there is a new threat of war, Jaruzelski declared that plans are being made for a "limited nuclear war," which he condemned, saying that hell cannot have limits if it is unleashed and that Poland has always been at the forefront of those who defend peace.⁶⁴ Regarding the internal situation, the Polish leader reiterated that the events were what made necessary the difficult and dramatic decision to impose martial law, a decision which, however, was taken as a last resort. From this point of view, he was not afraid of the judgment of posterity and was confident that it would prove him right. On the other hand, he insisted that there is the necessary will for the complete lifting of martial law, and if the situation evolves favorably, this could happen at a not too distant date. It was time, in his opinion, for the Poles' eyes to turn to the future, despite the resentments and bitterness that were still present among the citizens.⁶⁵

During the speech given at the meeting with the Polish political authorities, the Pope did not respond directly to Jaruzelski, nor did he combat his statements, but seemed to ignore them, but did not avoid addressing sensitive and highly topical subjects. He began by expressing his hope that the social agreements concluded in August 1980 could be implemented in the end, even though in the meantime the country had gone through a period in which the exigencies and restrictions of martial law were imposed, suspended at the beginning of 1983.⁶⁶ On the other hand, he referred to the initiatives of the Apostolic See on the issue of peace, some of them dating back several decades, such as the publication of the encyclical "Pacem in Terris" by Pope John XXIII or the Memorandum of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, from 1981, on the consequences of the use of atomic weapons, a memorandum that was forwarded to American, Soviet, English, French leaders, as well as the UN.⁶⁷ But, in the opinion of the Holy Father, there was also a much more delicate problem for the communist leaders of Poland, that of internal peace, of social peace in a particular country, which can only be achieved if the interests of the various groups are taken into account, through dialogue and "in the exercise of democratic freedoms and duties for all." In this sense, there are multiple

⁶³ NA, *Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and predecessors*, file no. FCO 28/5633 A: Pope's Visit to Poland. telegram of the British Embassy in Warsaw to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Jun. 18, 1983, 47.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ The National Archives, Kew, *Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and predecessors*, file no. FCO 28/5633 A: Pope's Visit to Poland telegram of the British Embassy in Warsaw to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, June 18, 1983, f. 47.

⁶⁶ Giovanni Paolo II, *Discorso Di Giovanni Paolo II Alle Autorità Statali nel Palazzo del Belvedere*,

https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1983/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19830617_autorita-statali.html (consulted on Sept 1, 2023).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

instances of conciliation "in disputes between employers and workers, so as to respect and associate the cultural, ethnic and religious groups that make up a nation." In the absence of conciliation, "when the dialogue between leaders and people is missing, social peace is also threatened or absent: it is generated as a state of war."⁶⁸

John Paul II also referred to the sacrifices that Poland had made during the war, saying that "the Polish nation obtained, paying a very high price, the right to be the sovereign master of the land it inherited from its ancestors." This second visit to Poland as Sovereign Pontiff was taking place at a very difficult time, but he hoped that these very challenges would be a path to renewal. "Even though, since December 13, 1981, life in Poland was subject to the severe rigors of the state of war, suspended at the beginning of this year, I do not cease to hope that the social reforms announced on many occasions and based on the principles agreed upon in the critical days of 1980, will be implemented."⁶⁹ Regarding international relations, the Pope stated that dialogue for peace is both necessary and possible and that peoples have demonstrated that they can overcome the most radical difficulties if they believe in the virtues of dialogue. Regarding East-West relations, the Pope stated that he sincerely hoped that Poland would have its rightful place among the nations of Europe. "I ardently desire the recreation of conditions for good cooperation with all the Western nations of the European continent, but especially with the United States of America, where many millions of citizens are of Polish origin. And this is a mission for dialogue, for international dialogue and for peace in today's world."⁷⁰ At the same time, the Holy Father also referred to another type of dialogue, the internal one. "The common effort for peace must be undertaken without ceasing through the exercise of democratic freedoms and duties, which is possible thanks to the structures of participation and the means of reconciliation between employers and workers and through the association of the cultural, ethnic and religious groups that form a nation. When, unfortunately, the dialogue between the government and the people is absent, social peace is threatened and it is a state of war."⁷¹

Regarding these two speeches, the British Embassy in Warsaw made a series of comments indicating that they were moderate and not obviously contradictory. Jaruzelski's speech had been predictable, and the biggest gain for him was to be seen alongside the Holy Father. Neither could the Pope's words obviously disturb him, given that the comments on social reforms were not

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ NA, *Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and predecessors*, file no. FCO 28/5633 A: Pope's Visit to Poland. telegram of the British Embassy in Warsaw to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Jun. 18, 1983, 47.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

directed against the Polish leader. Moreover, the hope expressed by John Paul II that Poland would renew cooperation with Western countries and with the United States was very useful for the Polish authorities' efforts to end international isolation.⁷²

Following the discussions with Jaruzelski, no official communiqué was issued, but the government spokesman implied, in a press conference for foreign correspondents, that the two protagonists did not agree, they did not find many common elements to bring their visions closer. "The problems are seen differently" - the spokesman admitted - adding that "we have a different way of thinking" than that of the Pope.⁷³

On the other hand, following the visit, General Jaruzelski was also forced to take measures if he wanted to save the regime. His position was very fragile, which was seen in the contrast between him and the Pope during their televised meeting. John Paul II spoke confidently, relying on the support of the overwhelming crowds of Poles, while the general fumbled, was agitated, unsure even of Soviet support, let alone that of the Poles. If it was hoped that the visit would offer some legitimacy to the regime, the events shattered such expectations.

A surprise second meeting, June 22, 1983

A second meeting between John Paul II and General Jaruzelski had not been scheduled, but it took place at Wawel Castle in Krakow on June 22.⁷⁴ At its end, no official communiqué was issued, but the Polish press agency announced laconically that the meeting had been proposed by the Church and offered the possibility of continuing the discussions of June 17. During it, according to the same source, hopes were expressed that "the papal visit would contribute to a peaceful and favorable development of social life in Poland and the strengthening of peace in Europe and in the world." It was also emphasized that "further contacts between the Holy See and the Polish People's Republic would serve the good of the state and the Church."⁷⁵

The truth was that this meeting, held towards the end of the papal visit, was totally unexpected, which generated questions and ambiguities regarding its purpose, but also many speculations regarding its initiator. Was it requested by the Church, as the government claimed, perhaps because the Pope considered it necessary, as a result of his travels through Central and Southern Poland and visits to major industrial centers, to discuss again with Jaruzelski and convey his

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ OSA, *Radio Free Europe Background Report/158*, J.B. Weydenthal, *The Pope's Pilgrimage to Poland*, Jul. 8, 1983, 3.

⁷⁴ "Întâlnire la Cracovia," *Scînteia*, Jun. 24, 1983, 6.

⁷⁵ OSA, *Radio Free Europe Background Report/158*, J.B. Weydenthal, *The Pope's Pilgrimage to Poland*, , Jul. 8, 1983, 3.

immediate impressions? Or did the initiative of the meeting come from government circles? At the time, no details were offered in this regard. Even so, it is hard to conceive that the Pope was not impressed both by the magnitude of the crowds that attended all his public events and by the solemn and enthusiastic response he received to his spiritual and moral messages. Moreover, the Pope certainly understood that most of the participants, who overcame the challenges of traveling over very long distances, the challenges of transportation and accommodation, to be present at the services officiated by their spiritual leader, not only had a very strong sense of their own identity, but repeatedly showed themselves determined to defend their right to affirm this identity. This determination was visible during and after religious services through the display of signs, the waving of flags, through expressive gestures; it was evident through songs, hymns and prayers; it was evident through the reactions people had to those passages in papal sermons that were perceived as an affirmation of their right to self-identify against the regime.⁷⁶ Is it possible that these signals received from the Poles prompted the Pope to warn Jaruzelski about the dangers of instability that threatened the regime?

The Romanian ambassador to Warsaw, Ion Cozma, for example, considered that this unexpected meeting had among its reasons and topics of discussion the issue of "revanchist revisionist manifestations of reactionary circles in the FRG."⁷⁷ The Polish press, even the Catholic press, offered the explanation that this second meeting was requested by Cardinal Glemp, quite concerned that some of the Pope's strong statements, especially the exhortations addressed to the youth to fight for freedom, would have triggered a violent reaction from the authorities with dire consequences for the Church.⁷⁸ The spokesman for the Polish government admitted that "the episcopate's proposal for this new meeting surprised even the authorities."⁷⁹

It should be added that during the visit, several government and party leaders, especially Deputy Prime Minister Mieczysław Rakowski and Foreign Minister Stefan Olszowski, vehemently criticized some of the Pope's statements. Rakowski, for example, tried to discredit the Holy Father's appeal to Polish youth to defend moral principles in difficult political conditions and criticized the claims that any public group should have a recognized right of free association. On the other hand, the persistence with which the authorities tried to eliminate any trace of autonomy in society could not go unnoticed. The government's decisions to ban an artists' union and dissolve the Catholic Intellectuals' Club in Częstochowa, both taken during the Pope's visit, were

⁷⁶ OSA, *Radio Free Europe Background Report/158*, J.B. Weydenthal, *The Pope's Pilgrimage to Poland*, , Jul. 8, 1983, 4.

⁷⁷ AMAE, *Fond 1983*, Polonia, Problem 210, File 1487, 240.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 251.

further confirmation.⁸⁰ In fact, the decisions had been made right after the first meeting between the Pope and Jaruzelski, as a demonstration of the regime's strength. Given these criticisms and these decisions, the authorities' relationship with the regime could not improve. The Polish public was determined to manifest independently, to assert itself, and the intransigence of the officials could only lead to a worsening of the situation, which was likely to worry the Pope. However, at a press conference following the June 22 meeting, the government spokesman indicated that the authorities were not considering any changes to current policies. As for the meeting, he limited himself to stating that it took place in "a frank and businesslike atmosphere" and offered an opportunity for "an exchange of views on fundamental matters."⁸¹ It is certain that the meeting with Jaruzelski did not seem very cordial, as can be read even from the statements of the government spokesman, who characterized the discussions as "very serious, concerned with the good of the country, honest and objective," unusual terms for the wooden language of the regime on such occasions.⁸²

As for General Jaruzelski, his insistence on having a second meeting with the Pope was an attempt to score some points in terms of authority in front of the Poles and, on the other hand, to show the Soviets that his "normalization" policy still has a chance of being supported by the population. His hope was that the Soviets would show more patience and understanding now, after seeing the size and strength of the opposition that the regime in Poland had to face. However, in the past, Moscow had not shown much leniency towards Polish leaders who failed to control society, and the possibility of Jaruzelski's removal was not accompanied by the hope of a softer line from the next one nominated by the Soviets.

On June 28, at a meeting of the heads of mission of the European Economic Community in Stuttgart, there was intense discussion about this second meeting between John Paul II and General Jaruzelski. Archbishop Poggi said that the meeting was not scheduled in the program and that the Polish bishops insisted that it take place. It is certain that it eclipsed at one point the audience granted by the Pope to Wałęsa. There was also no clear information about the content of the discussions; it was not known whether the Pope had brought up the issue of sanctions, which, in turn, were related to the lifting of the state of war by July 22. In the opinion of the Italian representative, Chelli, the primate of Poland had been the one who mediated the meeting for the Polish government. The authorities in Warsaw would have wanted to show that, nevertheless, their opinions must be heard during this historic visit. For

⁸⁰ OSA, *Radio Free Europe Background Report/158*, J.B. Weydenthal, *The Pope's Pilgrimage to Poland*, , Jul. 8, 1983, 4.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² "Pope Retunes Home After Secret Walesa Meeting," *The Times*, Jun. 24, 1983, 1.

Archbishop Silvestrini, it was important that the Pope and General Jaruzelski spoke twice as between Poles. The initiative had come from the Polish government, although it had been transmitted through the Episcopate, and it was important that the dialogue between these parties continued. It was now, in Silvestrini's opinion, a dialogue between the government and the Church, with Solidarity being irrelevant.⁸³

The last direct contact with the Polish authorities took place at the departure ceremony, which was again attended by Henryk Jabłoński, President of the State Council. Beyond the protocol statements, he expressed his hope that the Pope would remain "with his soul close to Poland" and assured him that the government's goal was not to standardize mentalities and conceptions, each citizen being free and master of their own opinions and beliefs, but with one condition: "not to harm the national being, the state and the inviolability of its borders." To the same extent, the head of state reiterated that externally Poland remained loyal to its commitments and alliances in the socialist bloc, pursuing "the promotion of peace and equality among peoples."⁸⁴ Finally, he defended government policies and admitted that there were very different views in Poland, as demonstrated by the Pope's visit. "Even our adversaries must admit that despite all the difficulties we have made visible progress... and the situation is diametrically different from that of the autumn of 1981, although there is still a long way to go to fully achieve our program."⁸⁵

Thanking for the invitation and the visit, John Paul II emphasized a few points of his message from the seven days spent in Poland: the need for moral and spiritual renewal, care for the dignity of work, "social love" and his empathy for Polish workers.⁸⁶ As the theme of work, workers and their rights was so important during the 1983 pilgrimage, the Pope also emphasized it during the departure ceremony at Krakow airport on June 23. Here he spoke of a moral order that must govern work, work carried out in the spirit of social love, to protect the worker, "his dignity and rights."⁸⁷

Conclusions

As the euphoria of the Pope's visit gave way to the harsh realities of everyday life, the question arose of the concrete results of his presence in Poland. The Vatican emphasized the religious and moral character of the

⁸³ NA, *Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and predecessors*, file no. FCO 28/5633 C: Pope's Visit to Poland, Jun. 28, 1983, 112.

⁸⁴ AMAE, *Fond 1983*, Polonia, Problem 210, File 1487, 248.

⁸⁵ "Pope Retunes Home After Secret Walesa Meeting," *The Times*, Jun. 24, 1983, 1.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Giovanni Paolo II, *Cerimonia di Congedo. Discorso di Giovanni Paolo II*, Cracovia, Jun. 23, 1983, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1983/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19830623_commiato-cracovia.html

(consulted on Dec. 1, 2023)

pilgrimage to his native country, and Christians around the world were spiritually strengthened by the power of the papal sermons, but also by the strength of the Poles' faith. But beyond the spiritual dimension, the presence in Poland of a Polish pope with such a strong personality as Karol Wojtyła could not fail to have a significant political impact.

When the issue of evaluations was raised at the end of the visit, the PAX Agency noted an interesting phenomenon, namely that the Party drew only negative conclusions and made catastrophic political predictions. In contrast, the state authorities were very optimistic, favorably assessed the visit and believed that it would even lead to the lifting of Western sanctions. The journalists from PAX also listed several notable consequences of the Holy Father's presence, including the fact that for a week, Polish society had a respite of relaxation after three years of divisions and turmoil. Secondly, the Pope's statements emphasizing the Polish historical character of the territories on the Western border strengthened the sense of belonging and even the security of the Poles in those regions. On the other hand, however, the negative effects could come later because the Pope had launched a series of themes and encouraged a series of hopes that the opposition could use to its own advantage, primarily the idea of establishing a Christian-democratic party, given that John Paul II had repeatedly spoken about political pluralism.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ AMAE, *Fond 1983*, Polonia, Problem 210, File 1487, 256-257.