

Excerpt from a letter from the Episcopate to the parish clergy of Poland, 1981

Certainly it is not our place, amidst our pastoral and educational work, amidst our prayers and our everyday difficulties, to get involved with strictly economic and political matters. But it is our place to bring to everyday Polish life the Gospel's spirit of peace, combined with calm reflection, since this is a necessary condition for the healthy socio-economic development that we all desire

The Gospel of peace is the primary pastoral commandment that Christ gave to his disciples: "When you go into a home, say first 'peace be unto this home'." (Matthew 10) Peace in the home, in the family, at work, in the shipyard, in the factory and in the workshop, in the field and in the mine, wherever. We know about this all too well. So, as we look around, as we see how various tensions grow and transform, how new tensions emerge and thrust into our daily lives—we appropriately recall that basic pastoral duty: wherever it is possible for us to do so, we must work to calm quarrels and strong feelings. That will be for us an appropriate task, one that has constituted our greatest service over the course of the history of the Church and the Fatherland, and which has brought the Church and the clergy recognition.

But peace is not stagnation. It is, after all, an act of justice. . . . Thus efforts aimed at expanding the boundaries of justice and social freedom are moral and justified. Indeed, recognizing this essential condition of peace is a duty. All the more so because justice flows from God himself, who set out the principles and defined the mutual rights and duties of life and cooperation. . . . The aspiration to expand the boundaries and strengthen the foundations of social life in accord with Christian principles of social justice is warranted, and even necessary.

There is no doubt that work on awakening the conscience and strengthening social justice is necessary in our Fatherland. The Church was aware of this when it began to trace out domestically the lines of a new socio-economic system. The Church did not just begin today to work on propagating the principles of a healthy social order, on defending personal rights, particularly the conditions of human labor—the Church has been doing this since the first years of this new stage in Polish history. It is often forgotten that particularly then, when everything was silenced under the pressure of political terror, the Church alone did not

back down, and its bishops and priests paid for their courage with imprisonment, with the loss of their Church positions, and with heavy criminal fines. The Church, the Episcopate of Poland, the bishops stood up in defense of those who were oppressed and wronged by the government during the various periods of social tension in our country.... A great movement has been born that aspires to create self-governing associations, the existence of which is the natural right of every man and of the entire Nation. It is an individual right, regardless of the already existing forms of associations, that people have the right to create the associations that best meet their personal, social, professional, or economic needs. It is not acceptable to create some sort of monopoly for a certain political group or to make concessions for one social strata to the exclusion of other citizens. . . .

The Holy Father, in his speech to pilgrims to Poland (January 21 of this year), wishing the Fatherland peace, also wished all citizens level-headedness and continued development. Precisely the issue of level-headedness has momentous social and civic meaning. . . . The powerful desire to do good for the children of the common Fatherland is in tension here with a situation in which one must move forward patiently, peacefully, and with a long time horizon. After all, it is not possible to repair from one day to the next all the injustices that have occurred in the life and consciousness of the Nation. . . . We need level-headedness and systematic efforts from all the national, moral, social, and state forces—in order to do this as well as possible, without creating new injustices or national losses. Thus it would be harmful to try stop initiatives already underway, or to make difficulties for citizens when one sees healthy and constructive work towards overcoming evil in the positive building of healthy socio-economic development, for the good of all the citizens of the common Fatherland. . . .

The beloved servants of the People of God in our Fatherland will be particularly alert to maintain this social peace and level-headedness so that we might achieve further development in the social aspiration for justice. . . . Since in this heated times many initiatives for renewal are arising, and some of these will have a short lifespan, priests, who have a more fundamental and long-term religious and pastoral task, ought not to join their pastoral work with political interventions. After all, the Church has never in its history become dependent upon political or pseudo-political groups and it never gave itself over in service to such groups. Thus priests, who are called to serve the entire People of God, ought not to join any initiative, even the most noble aimed at political

renewal. The clergy should limit itself to bringing everyone religious, moral, and charitable assistance, preserving its strength and time for its proper pastoral calling among the children of the Divine Fatherland. Priests will not sign any declarations of a political or public character, nor make any protests of any kind. Instead, they will inform their bishops if they observe the violation of the moral or civil rights of the faithful.

We trust that only in this way will we act in accordance with the instructions of the Holy Father, for the peace of our Fatherland, in the spirit of level-headedness, on the path towards further growth.

Source: "Biskupi polscy do duszpasterzy," Listy pasterskie Prymasa Polski oraz Episkopatu 1975-1981, trans. Brian Porter, (Paris: Éditions du Dialogue, 1988).