



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE INSTITUTE
OF POLISH NATIONAL PATRIMONY**

Sunday, 1 July 2001

Distinguished Gentlemen,

1. A cordial welcome to you all! Your presence in Rome and in the Vatican joins the celebrations of the 180th anniversary of Cyprian Kamil Norwid, one of Christian Europe's greatest poets and thinkers. We are all deeply indebted to this poet the fourth bard and would like to make the most of this occasion to repay him, at least in part. I have always maintained that Cyprian Norwid should have lain in the crypt of the great poets in Wawel Cathedral. This was not to be, since it proved impossible to find and identify the poet's remains. I therefore sought other ways of making amends for what had not been done for Norwid and what we feel to be our common duty. It is right that at least the urn with earth from the common grave in which the poet was buried should now stand in Wawel, in the place in our country that Norwid deserves, because our country, he wrote, "is the place where we can find rest and death" (*C.K. Norwid, Co to jest ojczyzna*, in "*Pisma wszystkie*", VII, PIW 1971-76, 50).

2. Gentlemen, I am happy to have this meeting and I attach great importance to it. To prepare for it, I reread Norwid's writings and spoke to those who appreciate him as I do. What I would like to tell you is largely the result of my exchange of thoughts with them. I honestly wanted to offer my personal debt of gratitude to the poet, with whose work I have been bound by a deep spiritual kinship since my secondary school years. During the Nazi occupation, Norwid's thoughts reinforced our hope in God, and in the period of the unjust and contemptuous dealings of the Communist system, he helped us persevere along with the truth, given to us as a duty to be lived with dignity. Cyprian Norwid left an *opus* from which shines the light that lets us more deeply penetrate the truth of our being as human persons, Christians, Europeans and Poles.

3. Norwid's poetry was born from the travail of his difficult life. It was formed in the light of a deep aesthetic of faith in God and of our humanity in God. Faith in the Love which is revealed in the Beauty that gives the "enthusiasm" to work, opens Norwid's words to the mystery of the covenant God makes with the human person, so that he may live, just as God lives. *Promethidion*, the canticle on the beauty of the Love and work, portrays the very act of creation in which God reveals to men the bond that binds labour with love (cf. Gn 1,28); it is in hard labour that man is born and reborn. The reader has to be mature for a word that takes him so far. The poet knew this very well when he said "the son will not know, but you, the grandson will remember" (*Klaskaniem majac obrzek^{3e} prawice*, II, 17).

4. The power of authority which Norwid represents for the "grandchildren" comes from the Cross. How eloquently his *scientia crucis* is revealed in the words: "Do not follow yourself with the Cross of the Saviour, but follow the Saviour with your cross.... This is finally the secret of the just way" (cf. Motto of *Promethidion Bogumi³*, III, 431). Norwid's *scientia crucis* enabled him to evaluate men according to whether they knew how to suffer with the Saviour who "is and was and will be the root of all truth" (*Letter to M. Trebicka*, May 1884, VIII, 213). The words with which our poet spoke of the greatness of Blessed Pius IX, are among the finest testimonies that a man can give another: "He is a great man of the 19th century. He knows how to suffer" (*Letter to Jan Skrzynecki*, May 1884, VIII, 63). It is significant that for Norwid crucifixes should be without the Christ figure, for in this way they could more clearly show the place where a Christian must be. Only those in whose intimate life the event of Golgotha is lived each day can say: "for us" the Cross "has become the door" (*Dziece i drzyz*, II, 170).

5. Norwid did not envy anyone anything, nor the honours they received. His poverty in God shines out in the finale of one of his poems: "The crown of laurels and hope are for someone else: for me, the only honour is to be a man" (*Odpowiedz Jadwidze Łuszczewskiej*, I, 323).

The honour of being a human being, almost inconceivable "on earth", is "more comprehensible in heaven" (*Dumani, I.*, I, 18), and the way to it leads precisely through the door of the Cross. In passing through it, man perceives that the truth about his being a human person infinitely exceeds him. From this stems his freedom. "Everything takes life from the Ideal (Absolute)" (*Wpracowni Guyskiego*, II, 194). Man journeys on as a pilgrim towards the ideal, but he receives it as a gift.

"Truth is awaited and attained at the same time" (*Idee i prawda*, II, 194), because "humanity comes from God" (*Letter to Józef Ignacy Kraszewski*, May 1863, IX, 99). Hence the immensity of the task that confronts the human person who, created "in the image and likeness" of God, is called to become like God, which is not easy, for "the effort required is immense precisely because it must be made daily" (*Kleopatra i Cezar*, V, 54). Only persons who are sober in "ordinary things" are capable of this effort, and then only when they are made "enthusiastic" by what is "eternal" (*Piec zarysów. III, Ruini*, III, 492-493). They alone will not prostrate themselves before Circumstances, nor command Truth "to hide behind the door" (*LXIX. Początek broszury*

politycznej..., II, 99). It is they who shape history, toiling for the truth as one toils to earn one's bread. They burn the earth with their conscience (*Socjalizm*, II, 19) and it is "Truth herself, the Veronica of consciences" (*Człowiek*, I, 274) who wipes the sweat from their "pallid brows".

6. Norwid insistently reminds us that without heroism humanity, "humiliated in its brow, hunched over itself" ceases to be itself. "Humanity deprived of divinity betrays itself" (*Rzecz o wolności s³owa*, I, III, 564). Society as a whole would be unable to oppose the non-heroic philosophy of our day which is ruining it, were not some people in it living out Norwid's question:

"In order to be national to be supra-national! And in order to be human, and therefore supra-human ... to be one and a half times as much why?". (*Rzecz o wolności s³owa*, II, III, 569).

Man is priest as yet still "unconscious and immature" (*Sfinks II*, II, 33), whose task in life from the outset is to build bridges (*ponti-fex*) that unite man with man, and all men with God. The societies where the human person's priestly character disappears are narrow-minded. This is a thought I have always cherished. I can say that to a certain extent it forms the social dimension of my pontificate.

With great sorrow Norwid told the Poles that they would never be good patriots if they did not first work hard at being men. Indeed, to expedite "that Augean task of being Polish" (Juliusz S³owacki, *Notatki in "Dziennik z lat 1847-1848"*, in "Dzie³a", XI, Ossolineum 1959), it is necessary not to be "a citizen of contemporary Poland ... but of a slightly old-fashioned Poland, yet a Poland that is very much of the future" (*List do Konstancji Górskiej*, July 1862, IX, 43). The country, according to Norwid, is to be found in a boundless Future, so that it may be found anywhere, even "at the borders of being" (*Fortepian Szopena*, II, 144-145). Those who forget this, make their country into a sect, and in the end enter the ranks of those who are "great"! in private matters; and in public matters behave like private people" (*Rozmowa umartych. Byron, Rafael-Sanzio*, I, 282). This is the principal of chaos in any society.

The order of the nation comes from outside it; in short, it comes from God, and so, for those who love their own nation in so farsighted a way, because it is priestly, there is no danger of nationalism. "The nation is not only made up of what distinguishes it from others, but also of what unites it to them" (*Znicestwienie narodu*, VII, 86). We know by heart, but do we know through experience, in our conscience, the painful content of the words: "Today the Pole is a giant, but man in the Pole is a dwarf.... The sun rises on the Pole, but shuts its eyes on man?" (*List do Michaliny z Dziekonskich Zaleskiej*, 14 November 1962, IX, 63-64). How many Polish matters could have turned out differently, if Poles had found in their conscience the truth proclaimed by Norwid that "the country is a collective commitment", which "by its nature consists of two: of what binds the country to man and of what binds man to his country" (*Memoria³ m³odej emigracji*, VII, 86).

Here in Rome, in the heart of the Church of which Norwid wrote that she is the oldest "citizen of

the world" (cf. *Głos niedawno do wychodztwa polskiego przybyłego artysty*, VII, 7), I repeat with emotion the words from *Moja Ojczyzna*: "No people has redeemed or created me; before the age I remember eternity; the key of David has forced my mouth, has called the Roman world man" *Moja ojczyzna*, I, 336.

7. Cyprian Norwid was the man of hope. Thanks to this he could live on this earth as befitted him, independently of the difficult conditions in which he existed. In prayer, he drew his hope from God to whom he turned with powerful words, such as those which the Saviour himself taught us: "Thy will be done, not as on earth (not in the most convenient way ... but in the way that is most worthy)" (*Badz wola Twoja...*, I, 150).

Prayer "shaped" the vision of the poet so that he fancied the "things of God beneath the shell of earthly things" (*O modlitwie*, VI, 618 e s.). Praying, he won over Love, in his profound faith that the voice of man, rising to heaven with that of Christ, is always heard (cf. *Monolog*, I, 79).

8. Gentlemen, please accept a few of Norwid's thoughts that "are not new" (*Się ich*, I, 172), as the expression of my debt of gratitude to the Poet for his work and also of my gratitude to you for your efforts to inform Poles of his work. May each one of them "by whom the road to Copernicus is paved" put "his own original accent" into what he does" (*Do Spartakusa [o pracy]*, VI, 641.) I wish all Poles and particularly those who appreciate Cyprian Norwid's writings, that the last words of *Fortepian Szopena* may be fulfilled through their work: "the deaf cobblestones groan: the spiritual has touched what is paved" (*Fortepian Szopena*, III, 239).

I bless you cordially, as I ask Our Lady, whom we call *Mater admirabilis* and whose praises Norwid sang so beautifully in the *Legenda* and in *Litania* to accompany you in this work that serves the Church, Europe and Poland.