

## **Orędzie biskupów polskich do biskupów niemieckich - Tekst angielski**

Reverend Council Brethren!

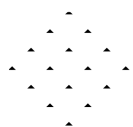
Before the Council is concluded, let us, honourable Brethren and our closest western neighbours, happily announce that the Church in Poland together with the whole Polish nation will celebrate the millennium of its baptism and at the same time the millennium of its state and national existence next year, the year of our Lord, 1966.

We would therefore like to officially invite you as our brothers to take part in the church celebrations of the Polish millennium. The culminating point of the Polish *Te Deum laudamus* will take place in the beginning of May 1966 in the Jasna Góra Monastery, dedicated to Virgin Mary, the Queen of Poland.

Let the following disquisition be a historical and at the same time very timely commentary to our millennium, which may – with God's help – bring our Nations even closer in our dialogue.

It is a historical fact that in 966 under the influence of his wife, the Czech princess Dobrawa, Mieszko I became the first ruler of Poland to receive the holy sacrament of baptism together with his court. From that moment on the Christian missionary work – which had already been conducted by Christian apostles in the whole Poland for generations – started to spread. The son and heir to Mieszko, Bolesław I the Brave, continued the process of Christianisation begun by his father and received Pope Sylvester II's consent to Poland's own hierarchy with its first metropolis in Gniezno and its three suffragan dioceses in Cracow, Wrocław and Kołobrzeg. The bishopric in Wrocław had been subordinate to Gniezno as the metropolis until 1821.

In 1000, the current Holy Roman Emperor Otto III and Bolesław I the Brave went on a pilgrimage to the tomb of Adalbert of Prague, who had died a martyr's death while converting the Baltic Prussians to Christianity several years before. Both rulers, the Roman one and the future Polish King (Bolesław was crowned king of Poland short before his death) covered a long distance to the holy relics in Gniezno barefooted and honoured them with great piety and emotion.



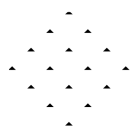
These are the historical beginnings of Christian Poland and at the same time the beginnings of our state and national unity. They laid the foundation for the subsequent rulers, kings, bishops and priests to develop this unity in Christian, ecclesiastical, state and national terms throughout all generations over the next 1000 years. The symbiosis between the Christian Church and the State has existed in Poland from the very beginning and has in fact never been broken. This in turn gradually led to the common thought among all Poles that what is “Polish” is also “Catholic”. Such thinking gave birth to the Polish religious style, in which the religious factor has been inextricably interwoven with the national factor from the beginning, with all positive and negative consequences of this relationship. (...)

The most recent German historiography gives our beginnings the following political and cultural meaning: “Through their contact with the empire of Otto the Great thousand years ago, Poland entered the Latin Christian community, and thanks to the admirable political dexterity of first Mieszko I and then Bolesław I the Brave, it became a regular member of the empire of Otto III, an empire based on the universal concept of embracing the whole non-Byzantine world, which made it substantially contribute to the shape of the eastern Europe.” This laid the basis and created the conditions for further fruitful German-Polish relations and for spreading the western culture.

Unfortunately, history shows that the German-Polish relations have not always remained that fruitful and in the past centuries turned into a kind of inherited neighbourly hostility, a topic to be discussed further in our letter (...)

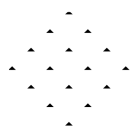
Włodkowic was to some extent a classic example of the Polish thought on tolerance and freedom. His theses were directed against the German military order of the Teutonic Knights, who at that time converted the locals in the Slavonic north and the Prussian and Baltic lands with fire and sword. Over the centuries, they became a terrible and the most compromising burden for the European Christianity and its symbol, the Cross, as well as the whole Church, which they claimed to represent. Even today, after many generations and centuries, the Polish word krzyżak (Teutonic Knight) is a horrific term of abuse for every Pole and one that, unfortunately, has been too often identified with everything that is German for a long time.

The lands where the Teutonic Knights had settled later on gave birth to those Prussians who brought common discredit upon everything that is German in the Polish lands. Throughout history, they have been represented by the following names: Albert of Prussia, Frederick the Great, Otto von Bismarck and finally Hitler as the climax.



It is undoubtedly not without reason that Frederick the Great is seen by the whole Polish nation as the main initiator of the partitions of our country. For 150 years, many millions of Poles have lived under the rule of three contemporary powers: Prussia, Russia and Austria. It could finally rise from the ashes and – even though severely weakened – begin its national existence in extreme hardships anew in 1918, when the First World War ended.

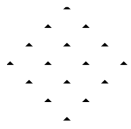
After a short period of independence (just around 20 years from 1918 until 1939), Poles – who cannot be attributed any blame for that – saw the beginning of something euphemistically called the Second World War, which we perceive as an act of total destruction and annihilation. A horribly dark night fell on our poor Homeland, a horror we had not experienced for generations. It is commonly described here as the period of the “German occupation” and known by this name in the Polish history. We were all helpless and defenceless. The country was covered with concentration camps with crematorium chimneys belching smoke day and night. More than six million Polish citizens, including especially those of Jewish descent, paid for the occupation with their lives. The leadership part of the intelligentsia was simply destroyed, and two thousand priests and five bishops (one fourth of the then Episcopate) were murdered in camps. Hundreds of priests and tens of thousands of civilians were put before firing squads at the beginning of the war (for example 278 priests in the Diocese of Chełmno itself). The Diocese of Włocławek lost 48 per cent of its priests during the war, and the Diocese of Chełmno lost 47 per cent of its clergy. Many others were displaced. All secondary schools and universities were closed and seminaries were liquidated. Every German SS uniform not only filled Poles with utter fear but also became an object of hate towards Germans. All Polish families had to bewail someone who fell victim to the oppressors. We do not want to enumerate every painful recollection so that the still fresh wounds can heal, but if we do talk about the terrible Polish night, it is only for us and our current way of thinking to be understood more easily today. We try to forget. We hope that time, the great and diving kairos, can heal all our spiritual wounds.



After everything that happened in the past, which is unfortunately still not that distant, it is no wonder that the whole Polish nation feels the importance of the fundamental need for safety and that it still regards its closest neighbours in the West with mistrust. One could say that this attitude is a problem of our generations, which – God help us – will and must disappear with a bit of goodwill. The Catholic Church and the Blessed Virgin, together with the Polish family, have always been sources of hope and symbols of national unity in the hardest political and spiritual moments of the nation's torment. In the times of their oppression and in all liberation battles, Poles have always manned the barricades with their symbols on the banners: white eagles on the one side and the image of the Heavenly Mother on the other. Their motto has always been "For our freedom and yours". (...)

Dear German Brethren, do not bear us a grudge for enumerating what happened in the recent period of our millennium. It is not meant as an accusation but rather justification of our own actions. We know very well that a huge part of the German society was under inhumane, national and socialist pressure. We know of the terrible inner torment suffered at some point by righteous and responsible German bishops, for example Cardinal Faulhaber, von Galen or Preysing. We know of the White Rose martyrs, of the resistance fighters of 20 July, of the fact that many laymen and priests sacrificed their lives (Lichtenberg, Metzger, Klausener and many others). Thousands of Germans, both Christians and communists, shared the fate of our Polish brethren in concentration camps...

And despite all that, despite the situation almost hopelessly burdened with the past, we appeal to you now, reverend Brethren: let us keep trying to forget. We do not want any polemics, any cold war but just the beginning of a dialogue pursued also by the Council and Pope Paul VI. If there is good will at both sides – and there undoubtedly is – a serious dialogue is definitely possible and can bear positive fruit with time, despite everything. (...)



We ask you, Catholic Shepherds of the German nation, to celebrate our Christian millennium in your own way, be it through prayers or through a special memorial day. We will be grateful for every similar gesture. And we would also like to ask you to send our greetings and words of gratitude to the German Evangelical Brethren, who struggle with you and with us to find solutions to our problems.

In this most Christian but also very humane spirit, we extend our hands to you sitting on the benches of the ending Council. We forgive and ask for forgiveness. Only if you, German Bishops and Council Fathers, grasp our hands held out to you in a gesture of brotherhood will we be able to celebrate our millennium in the most Christian way and in peace.

We cordially invite you to Poland to join us in the celebrations. May this be the will of our Saviour and Virgin Mary, the Queen of Poland, Regina Mundi and Mater Ecclesiae.

Rome, 18 November 1965