

Remarks Following Discussions With Pope John Paul II in Vatican City

June 6, 1987

Your Holiness, I am truly grateful for the opportunity to visit with you again in this place of peace. You've always said that the power of love for our fellow man is stronger than the evils that befall mankind—or humankind. And one feels the power of that strong moral force here in this holy city of Saint Peter, just as we see it in your courageous and compassionate leadership.

Your Holiness, on my last visit here, I urged you to carry your ministry to the Southern and Western sections of the United States, and you graciously agreed, and I know that all America looks forward to your arrival in September. You will find in our country a deeply religious people, a people devoted to the same ideals and values you so eloquently champion: a striving for peace and justice, human rights, and above all, our duty as fellow creatures of God to love one another.

Not long ago, Your Holiness, you visited Canada where you spoke passionately of the moral obligation of the wealthier nations to share with those less fortunate. Recently, I also traveled to Canada and said it's time that we take up that challenge, to share our prosperity with the underdeveloped nations, with generous aid, yes, but also in the most effective way we know: by sharing the conditions that promote prosperity. You have spoken eloquently of "the moral causes of prosperity," among them hard work, honesty, initiative, thrift, spirit of service, and daring. In many countries today, we see economic revolutions founded on this basic tenet: that the sources of prosperity are moral ones, that the spirit and imagination of man freed of statist shackles is a revolutionary force for growth and human betterment.

In your travels, you've inspired millions, people of all races and all faiths, who have felt the intensity of your desire for peace and brotherhood among men. As you embark on a pastoral visit to the land of your birth, Poland, be assured that the hearts of the American people are with you. Our prayers will go with you in profound hope that soon the hand of God will lighten the terrible burden of brave people everywhere who yearn for freedom, even as all men and women yearn for the freedom that God gave us all when he gave us a free will. We see the power of the spiritual force in that troubled land, uniting a people in hope, just as we see the powerful stirrings to the East of a belief that will not die despite generations of oppression. Perhaps it's not too much to hope that true change will come to all countries that now deny or hinder the freedom to worship God. And perhaps we'll see that change comes through the reemergence of faith, through the irresistible power of a religious renewal. For despite all the attempts to extinguish it, the people's faith burns with a passionate heat; once allowed to breathe free, that faith will burn so brightly it will light the world.

Your Holiness, when I last visited you, our representative in Vatican City was a personal envoy. Now, I'm happy to say, America is represented here by a full-fledged diplomatic mission at the ambassadorial level. The consequence of our efforts deserves nothing less, for we join with the Holy See in our concern for a world of peace, where armaments are reduced and human rights respected, a world of justice and hope, where each of God's creatures has the means and opportunity to develop to his or her full potential. Your Holiness, I'm reminded of the passage from the Bible of Saint Peter walking out on the water after Christ. We know that as long as he kept his eyes on our Savior, as long as his faith was strong, he was held up, but as soon as his faith faltered, he began to sink. Your Holiness, with gentle chidings and powerful exhortations you have continually directed our thoughts to the spiritual source of all true goodness and happiness.

At the opening of the Second Vatican Council, in which you played such an important role, Pope John XXIII spoke of the duty of every Christian to "tend always toward heaven." In your great courage and compassion, in your piety and the boundless energy with which you carry out your mission, you have set an example for the world. It's an example that challenges us all to live a life of charity, to live a life of prayer, to work for peace, and, in that beautiful phrase of John XXIII, to "tend always toward heaven."

I know that today marks the beginning of a very important time for you personally and for the people of your faith, for it's this day that you begin the observance of a year of prayer and devotion to the Virgin Mary with a worldwide prayer for peace. I wish you great joy, happiness, and fulfillment in the coming months. And I thank you, your Holiness, and may God bless you.

Note: The President spoke at noon in the papal Library at the Pontifical Palace. Following his audience, he met with American seminarians and priests in Sala Clementine. Later in the afternoon, President Reagan attended a luncheon with Italian President Francesco Cossiga and Prime Minister Amintore Fanfani at Castel Porziano. Following the luncheon, President Reagan returned to Villa Condulmer in Mogliano, Italy.

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