

## **The Church in World Politics**

*Until just recently, when Karol Wojtyła became John Paul II - and thirteen years are quite a short time in the life of the Catholic Church - it was plainly inconceivable that the Pontiff of Rome could have, by way of both his moral and pastoral authority, such political weight on the international scene.*

*Even under the guise of a State endowed with all the formal features of an international actor, the Vatican had attempted in vain to enter a number of the international institutions that were being created after World War II, even institutions as innocuous as the Council of Europe. But at present the picture has completely changed, and the legal status of the Vatican City State is no longer even needed to give Rome an extremely authoritative say in world affairs. Today, it is the Church directly which boasts a determining weight, and exerts a role that is no longer solely a religious one. All this is very visible in the question of Jerusalem, where the problem is not the recognition of Israel by the Vatican as a State - a recognition that is politically acquired, recognised as due, and might be formalised soon anyway - but rather the ambition of the Church as an assembly of the faithful to perform the role of protector of the "living" Christian community in the Holy City.*

*The weight of the Church is very visible also in Europe, East and West - in the whole of Europe, and not only in Poland, where the religious society has replaced civil society in the struggle and eventual defeat of Communism. Today, the Church is taking a very clear political stand on Western Europe's political and social life as well, is condemning its mass edonism and individualistic materialism that (much more strongly than the collectivistic materialism of socialist societies) dominates in the capitalistic and democratic*

*part of the Old World, and indicates in its Christian roots the ideological basis of a united Europe. Our age, in the view of the Church, is marked not only by the collapse of leftist ideologies, but also by such a total triumph of Western values that, all its promises having been fulfilled, they shows a cruel incapacity to guide further historical developments, and thus inspire and direct political thinking, initiative and action. In this vacuum, Catholicism is emerging as a candidate to provide a moral and political guideline .*

*And, as it seems that there is no forthcoming "end of history", our generation cannot escape taking the future into consideration. All the more so as neither communism, not its collapse, have eliminated the problem of equality within the human race, and as global modernisation is badly ill with anomie, lack of purpose, and deprived of a universally accepted moral code.*

*On the hundredth anniversary of the Rerum Novarum, the Encyclical that laid the foundations of the so-called Catholic Social Doctrine, a new document was thus published in the Spring of 1991, where it is clearly spelled that the faithful cannot limit himself to compassion, benevolence or charity. Therefore, for the first time ever, the teaching of the Church does not limits itself merely to the redistribution of wealth, but also faces the problem of the production of wealth with the most rational use of human and natural resources, i. e. in a manner as efficient as only the profit incentive seems to guarantee .*

*It is easy to forecast, on this basis, that the Catholic Church will, in the years to come, try to play on the world scene a bigger role than just that of an actor among other actors, and make the impact of its presence in world affairs felt far beyond the brief decedes that have been marked by the communist challenge and the East-West rivalry. Actually, as we will see in a future issue of this Journal, the Church is trying to address the crucial issue of how to create a world that would be just as well as peaceful, and thus proposing itself as nothing less the ideological and political point of reference for the challenges of the post-modern times. (g. s.)*