

**POLISH EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE**

---

# **THE CHRISTIAN FORM OF PATRIOTISM**

**A document submitted  
to the Polish Episcopal Conference  
by the Social Affairs Committee**

---





POLISH EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE

---

# THE CHRISTIAN FORM OF PATRIOTISM

**A document submitted  
to the Polish Episcopal Conference  
by the Social Affairs Committee**

---

Wydano z inicjatywy  
**abp. Józefa Kupnego**  
Przewodniczącego Rady do Spraw Społecznych  
Konferencji Episkopatu Polski

© Copyright by Polish Episcopal Conference

Projekt graficzny i przygotowanie do druku: Bożena Sobota

ISBN 978-83-7454-402-3

TUM Wydawnictwo i Drukarnia Wrocławskiej  
Księgarni Archidiecezjalnej  
50-329 Wrocław, pl. Katedralny 19  
e-mail: [tum@archidiecezja.wroc.pl](mailto:tum@archidiecezja.wroc.pl)



Christian perfection is achieved by removing everything that disturbs, distracts, or does not allow the beauty of the image of God in every human being to be extracted. The more we succeed in our pursuit of this perfection, the more we are similar to God. It is the same with love for one's native land, which must be purified. That is why the Polish Episcopal Conference published its document, the *Christian form of patriotism*, which is a voice of support for patriotic attitudes and an expression of gratitude to all those, thanks to whom Polish patriotism is lasting and vital. It is also a declaration that the Catholic Church in Poland will, by using tools resulting from its mission, demonstrate its appreciation for and support of such activities. But at the same time it is a document calling for reflection on the shape of modern patriotism and encouraging people to boldly remove from it everything that is in contradiction with the teachings of the Gospel.

This document from the Polish Episcopate, the *Christian form of patriotism*, is a response to the requests of the faithful, who on the one hand – just like the Church – have noticed the revival of patriotic attitudes in Poland, but on the other hand who have witnessed certain behaviours and attitudes presented under the banner of patriotism that are in conflict with the Christian spirit and with

the Gospel. As a result, the Polish bishops decided to recall how the Christian should express love for their homeland. This document sets out a framework; and the actions that are contained within it have a Christian mark. Whatever goes beyond this framework cannot be called Christian.

This document is addressed to all people of good will, and above all to the parents, educators, scout instructors, catechists, and priests who help to shape the younger generation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Józef Kupny', with a small cross symbol to its left.

† Józef Kupny  
*Archbishop of Wrocław  
Head of the Social Affairs Committee  
of the Polish Episcopal Conference*

## INTRODUCTION

The rebirth of patriotic attitudes and the awareness of national identity which we have witnessed in recent years in Poland is a very positive phenomenon. After all, a love of one's country and one's national culture and traditions is not solely connected with the past; rather, it is inseparably tied to our ability today to act selflessly and unitedly in the building of a common good. Thus, such attitudes influence the shape of our future.

At the same time, however, we may discern the appearance in our country of phenomena contrary to patriotism, whose shared basis is egoism. This might be individual egoism, an ambivalence to the fate of the wider national community, an exclusive concern only for oneself and/or one's closest friends and family. Such a disregard for the riches which each of us receives from our common language and shared native history and culture, when connected with an ambivalence to the fate of our fellow countrymen, is an un-Christian attitude. However, there is also a national egoism, a nationalism cultivating feelings of its own superiority and shutting itself off from other national cultures and human society in general. So, patriotism must always be an open phenomenon. As our great countryman Henryk Sienkiewicz so rightly wrote: 'the watchword of all patriots should be: from our homeland to the world'<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> D. Gawin (2005). *Polska, wieczny romans. O związkach literatury i polityki w XX wieku*, Kraków, p. 41.

Bearing in mind the current reawakening of Polish patriotism, and also the real potential threat it poses, the Fathers of the Church in Poland seek to consider this phenomenon from the perspective of the teaching of the Catholic Church.

## I. PATRIOTISM – A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

**1. Universal dimension of patriotism.** Above all, we must remember that patriotism is deeply rooted in the universal precept of love for one's nearest and dearest. Intergenerational solidarity, responsibility for the wellbeing of the weakest, basic civic integrity, readiness to serve and volunteer one's support for the good of society – these are all inextricably linked with patriotism and are at the same time manifestations of the Message proclaimed in the Gospels. Therefore, as Pope St Pius X wrote: 'the Church has always taught that patriotism is a duty and is connected with the injunction of God's 4th Commandment'<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, however, for disciples of Christ, love of one's country – as a form of love for one's nearest and dearest – while it may be of great value, is nonetheless not an absolute. For a Christian, offering service to one's native land, just as with expressing love for one's family, represents a stage on the road to the Heavenly Kingdom, which thanks to the boundless nature of God's love embraces all people and nations on the Earth. Love for one's native land is, therefore, a substantiation of the universal precept of the love of God and Man.

Almost half a century ago, the Polish bishops advised their fellow countrymen: 'Although man places the values of his native land very high, he nonetheless knows above

---

<sup>2</sup> Pius X, Apostolic Letter, 11 April 1909, in: C. Strzeszewski, *Katolicka nauka społeczna*, KUL, Lublin 2003, p. 508.

all nations sits God, who alone has the right to establish the highest moral norms, regardless of individual nations. Such a sense of reality bases patriotism on truth, purifies it and enables the strengthening of the awareness of the community of the human family. It protects us from ambivalence towards the fate of others, makes us increasingly sensitive to the needs of every man, irrespective of the language he speaks and what national feelings he has<sup>3</sup>.

From such a Christian perspective, love of one's native land expresses itself above all through service and concern and taking responsibility for the needs and lot of a real group of people, whom God has placed on the road before us. Therefore, one should consider totally unacceptable and idolatrous every attempt to transfer one's native land to the sphere of absoluteness. The same applies to the search in Christianity for justifications for broadening national conflicts and quarrels. Love of one's native land can never be a justification for contempt, aggression or violence.

**2. Nationalism as opposed to patriotism.** In its teachings, the Church clearly distinguishes the honourable and decent dissemination of patriotism from its egoistical relative, nationalism.

Before the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1995, St John Paul II highlighted that 'we need to clarify the essential difference between an unhealthy form of nationalism, which teaches contempt for other nations or cultures, and patriotism, which is a proper love of one's country. True patriotism never seeks to advance the well-being of one's own nation at the expense of others. For in

---

<sup>3</sup> List Episkopatu Polski o chrześcijańskim patriotyzmie, Poznań, 5 September 1972 (1975). in: *Listy Pastorskie Episkopatu Polski 1945–1974*, Éditions du Dialogue, Paryż, p. 708.

the end this would harm one's own nation as well: doing wrong damages both aggressor and victim. Nationalism, particularly in its most radical forms, is thus the antithesis of true patriotism, and today we must ensure that extreme nationalism does not continue to give rise to new forms of the aberrations of totalitarianism. This is a commitment which also holds true, obviously, in cases where religion itself is made the basis of nationalism, as unfortunately happens in certain manifestations of so-called "fundamentalism"<sup>4</sup>.

In a similar manner, the Polish bishops recognised this in their message to their fellow Poles (mentioned above), when they wrote that: 'true love for one's country is based on a deep sense of belonging and love of that which is native, irrespective of time or location. It is connected with a deep respect for everything valued by other nations. It demands appreciation of every good found outside us and a readiness to improve ourselves on the basis of the achievements and experience of other nations. The creative strength of true patriotism is therefore the most honourable love, free of hate, because hate is a debilitating force which leads to disease and the degeneration of well-intentioned patriotism'<sup>5</sup>.

From the same Christian perspective, we would today like to note that patriotism, as a form of solidarity with and love for one's nearest and dearest, is not an abstract ideology; rather, it is a moral calling to do good here and now: in identifiable places, in concrete conditions, and

---

<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, To the United Nations Organization (New York, October 5, 1995), <[http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1995/october/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_05101995\\_address-to-uno.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1995/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_05101995_address-to-uno.html)>.

<sup>5</sup> List Episkopatu Polski o chrześcijańskim patriotyzmie, p. 707.

among specific people. As it is not an ideology, patriotism does not require a rigid ideological or cultural shape, even less so a political one; however, in a variety of ways it takes root and bears fruit in the lives of people and different communities who earnestly desire to create a common good<sup>6</sup>.

Thus, patriotism differentiates itself from the ideology of nationalism, which frequently places distrust of the other, rigid diagnoses and political programmes before real, everyday interactions with individual people in the family, at school or work, or in the places where we live. So, nationalism seeks to fit cultural, regional and political diversity into one uniform and simplified ideological scheme.

It also needs to be stressed that in the contemporary world mature patriotism – understood as love for one's nearest and dearest, solidarity, responsibility for the well-being of specific people, openness to cooperation with others – represents one of the sources of the feelings of fear, of being lost or threatened, off which many ideologies feed. Such ideologies as deny the existence of interpersonal connections, reducing Man to an individual isolated from others or appeal to the language of nationalism.

So, we wish once again today to underline the fact that the patriotism well-known from our history and which was open to honest cooperation with other nations and based on respect for other cultures and languages is necessary in our native land. Patriotism without violence and contempt. Patriotism that is sensitive to the suffering and pain affecting other people and nations.

**3. Patriotism of all citizens.** Therefore, we stress and remind one another that every Polish citizen has his part

---

<sup>6</sup> In a similar manner, St John Paul II wrote on the topic of ideology. See: Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*.

to play in the life and development of our country. The history and identity of our country are especially closely tied to the Latin tradition of the Catholic Church. Also, alongside the Catholic majority, our shared native land has been well served and still continues to be so by Poles who are Orthodox Christians and Protestants, as well believers in Judaism and Islam and other beliefs and those who do not adhere to any religious tradition. Even though during the Holocaust and other tragic events of the Second World War a lot of them were killed and are no longer amongst us, their contribution will remain imprinted upon our culture and their descendents are still enriching are public life.

Therefore, modern Polish patriotism, remembering the contribution it has received from Catholicism and Polish tradition, should always harbour respect and a feeling of community towards all citizens, without regard to their beliefs or origins, for whom Polishness and patriotism are moral and cultural choices.

**4. Patriotism here and now.** We would also like to mention the everyday and civic dimension of our patriotism. It is the case that in difficult moments, in times of captivity and national difficulties patriotism has often been an examination demanding bravery and heroism. These trials were passed with commitment and bravery by those involved in the Polish Uprising, by our soldiers, members of the Underground and democratic anti-communist opposition. The creators of the Polish underground state also passed these tests, as did the civilian population of Warsaw and many other Polish cities and towns, not to forget the representatives of the Church. Preserving the grateful memory of our heroic brothers and sisters who have passed this exam, with the awareness

that even we may at some stage receive the same calling we should remember that we can also be called upon to pass the exam of patriotism in times of freedom and peace. As the bishops noted: 'true love of one's native land is not so much a beautiful, celebratory declaration as it is a practical attitude, a committed concern and willingness to work for the common good'<sup>7</sup>.

Today patriotism should find expression in the lives of our families, which are the first school of love, responsibility and care for our nearest and dearest. The sphere in which we have our patriotism tested on a daily basis are those places which surround our daily life – town, parish, school, place of work, neighbourhood and local community. In all these places patriotism calls us to acts of kindness, solidarity, honesty and concern for the creation of a common good.

Patriotism is manifested in our civic mindset; in a respect for rules and regulations which organise and enable communal life, such as – for example – regular payment of taxes; in an interest in public affairs and in responsible participation in democratic processes; in the reliable and honest fulfilment of our professional duties; in our concern for our history and respect for national figures and symbols; in our respect for the environment surrounding us; in our engagement in local government and the work of countless organisations in their performance of various community activities.

In the event of fierce political dispute, such as the one which currently divides our nation, our patriotic duty also demands involvement in projects aimed at social reconciliation as opposed to division. This can be achieved by remembering the right to dignity enjoyed by everyone, by

---

<sup>7</sup> List Episkopatu Polski o chrześcijańskim patriotyzmie, p. 708.

soothing excessive political emotions, and by identifying and expanding the range of possible and essential avenues of cooperation in Poland and also by protecting public life from unnecessary politicisation. And the first step to be taken in this patriotic service is reflection upon the language we use to describe our nation, our fellow citizens and ourselves. This is because everywhere – in private conversations, in official interactions, in debates, in traditional and social media – we are obliged to show love to those around us. Therefore the yardstick of Christian and patriotic sensitivity is the expression of our own opinions and beliefs with respect for our fellow citizens – even those holding different views – and in a spirit of friendliness and responsibility, without recourse to simplistic and hurtful comparisons.

‘Let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth’, quoted St John Paul II from the Apostle adding: ‘Let us think about this “Polish truth”. Let us think about whether it is respected in our homes, in the means of social communication, in public offices, in parishes. Does it not sometimes escape us under the pressure of circumstances? Does it not become distorted, simplified? Is it always at the service of love?’

Let us think about “Polish practice”. Let us see whether it is carried out with prudence. Is it systematic and persevering? Is it courageous and magnanimous? Does it unite people or divide them? Does it treat anyone with hatred or contempt? Or is there too little practice of love, of Christian love?<sup>8</sup>. These questions posed by the Polish Pope are still valid today.

---

<sup>8</sup> John Paul II, Canonization of Blessed Queen Hedwig, Krakow, <[http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1997/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19970608\\_cracovia.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1997/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19970608_cracovia.html)>.

**5. Patriotism: national and local.** In the light of rules of subsidiarity, it is worth recognising that a natural supporter of national patriotism is local patriotism. Our homeland, if it is not to be simply a symbolic or political category, should have the colour of the sky and the landscape of a definite place. And her countenance we can recognise in the faces and fates of those with whom we live our daily lives. It is important, therefore, that our national identity and national patriotism are open to a variety of local communities; that our Polishness should find its manifestation and enrichment in the specific, in culture and custom, and sometimes in the special accent or dialect of individual areas and regions. Poland should remain a community of citizens who, while retaining their local identity, show concern for the common good on a national scale and feel themselves to be part of a national community.

**6. Paradigms of Polish identity.** A common national history is a treasure trove and a teacher of honourable patriotism infused with the Christian spirit. Without going into too much detail, we should remember simply that two complementary threads are interwoven: the thread of ethnic Polishness and the thread of cultural Polishness.

As John Paul II expressed it: 'From the outset, at the time when the Polanian, Vistulan and other tribes were merging, it was the Polish spirit of the Piast dynasty that provided the unifying element: theirs was, so to speak, the "pure" Polish spirit. Later, for five centuries, the Polish spirit of the Jagiellonian era prevailed. This made possible the emergence of a Republic embracing many nations, many cultures, many religions. All Poles bear within themselves a sense of this religious and national diversity.'

I myself come from Malopolska, from the territory of the ancient Vistulan tribe, closely linked to Krakow. And yet in Malopolska – perhaps more in Krakow than elsewhere – there was a sense of proximity to Vilnius, to Lvov, and to the East.

A further element of great importance in the ethnic composition of Poland was the presence of the Jews. I remember that at least a third of my classmates at elementary school in Wadowice were Jews. At secondary school they were fewer. With some I was on very friendly terms. And what struck me about some of them was their Polish patriotism. Fundamental to the Polish spirit, then, is multiplicity and pluralism, not limitation and closure. It seems, though, that the “Jagiellonian” dimension of the Polish spirit, mentioned above, has sadly ceased to be an evident feature of our time<sup>9</sup>.

We would like, therefore, to recall that in the times of its historical grandness the Commonwealth, while retaining its traditions and identity, became the common home for people of various languages, cultures, convictions and even religions. Under the Polish sky and on Polish land Catholics of various persuasions, orthodox Christians, Protestants, Jews and Muslims lived side by side, earned their daily bread, prayed and created their own customs and culture. Besides the ethnic Poles the loyal citizens of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth included Jews, Ukrainians, Ruthenians, Lithuanians, Germans, Armenians, Czechs, Tatars and members of other nationalities. We should also not forget that in those times when Europe was riven by war and religious

---

<sup>9</sup> Pope John Paul II (2005). *Memory and identity: Conversations at the Dawn of a Millennium*. Rizzoli, New York, p.

persecution, the Commonwealth was a bulwark of hospitality and tolerance.

Thanks to this, the model of hospitable patriotism was formed in Polish culture. This incorporated and was inspired by the best achievements of its neighbours and of all Christian European culture. This was a patriotism, thanks to which those who wanted to become Poles were able to do so, regardless of their origins or those of their ancestors. A patriotism whose appearance was created and praised, among others, by St Queen Jadwiga, Nicholas Copernicus, Adam Mickiewicz and Joachim Lelewel. A patriotism which – in its interactions with other cultures – shaped Polish literature, music, science, art, architecture and customs.

In the times of servitude and the national struggle for independence our patriotism remained open and in solidarity with others. Compelling is the motto from the standards 'For our freedom and yours' under which Poles fought and died in the nineteenth century. This also symbolises our national necropolis at Monte Cassino, where Polish heroes of various convictions and religions rest. As the words of St Paul eloquently remind us 'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good'. This became the slogan of the chaplain to 'Solidarity', the Blessed Jerzy Popiełuszko. This was magnificently embodied by the incomparable ethos of 'Solidarity', which at the end of the twentieth century became a visible, honourable and victorious symbol for the whole modern world.

**7. Memory and forgiveness.** Remembering the great and beautiful lesson of Polish history, it is necessary to appreciate and value the effort taken today by historians, public organisations and individual citizens to maintain and

sometimes refresh our national memory. It is thanks to these people that we remember with gratitude and sometimes even come to know the names of national heroes. It is thanks to them that we remember the martyrdom of all those of our brothers and sisters who were murdered and persecuted simply for being Polish.

Remembering their heroism and suffering, we have to be fully aware that Christianity calls us as a people to set out steadfastly on the road of forgiveness and unity. As if, by tending the memory of our sacrifices and suffering, we might try to free it from a paralysing pain, a feeling of being wronged, and sometimes hate. In this respect, we would like to recall the words of Pope Francis to the people of Poland: 'Looking at your recent history, I thank God that you have been able to let good memory have the upper hand, for example, by celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the forgiveness mutually offered and accepted between the Polish and German episcopates, following the Second World War. That initiative, which initially involved the ecclesial communities, also sparked an irreversible social, political, cultural and religious process that changed the history of relationships between the two peoples. Here too we can think of the Joint Declaration between the Catholic Church in Poland and the Orthodox Church of Moscow: an act that inaugurated a process of rapprochement and fraternity not only between the two Churches, but also between the two peoples'<sup>10</sup>.

Even today we as Christians are called, despite our dramatic historical wounds, to become witnesses of forgi-

---

<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, Meeting with the Authorities, the Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps in the courtyard of Wawel (Kraków, 27 July 2016), <[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160727\\_polonia-autorita-cd.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/july/documents/papa-francesco_20160727_polonia-autorita-cd.html)>.

veness and reconciliation that are based on truth and compassion. We are convinced that patiently moving towards these values, both with regards to our neighbours and within our own country, is not only our duty but also the priceless contribution we are able to make and which as Christians we are able to contribute to the development of our beloved country.

## II. EDUCATION TOWARDS PATRIOTISM

**8. Responsible historical politics.** In many countries, including our own, public institutions, local government and politicians join forces in the building of a national identity and patriotic mindset. In these times of an increasingly globalised, unified and technologically advanced world, it is necessary to recognise as legitimate and justified people's attempts to preserve their own identity, their common historical memory, their feelings of national solidarity and their desire for deserved respect and recognition from others.

To underline this, we wish to note the Christian viewpoint is faced here with a specific calling and challenge. The goal of measured historical politics is the uniting of people around a common good, the strengthening of interpersonal ties and the sense of a community of shared spiritual values, rather than focusing on differences and divisions. Therefore in the light of Christian respect for human dignity and also the Christian view of politics, one should consider dangerous and illegitimate the abuse and instrumentalisation of historical memory in current political conflict and rivalry. For in an environment where historical analogies are often naturally used too hastily and historical arguments may usurp economic, legal and social reason, the possibility of the equitable compromise which is essential in a democratic society may become more distant, or even impossible to achieve<sup>11</sup>.

---

<sup>11</sup> See: J. Ratzinger (2008). *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*. Ignatius Press, San Francisco.

**9. The distinctive mission of the family.** During discussion of various aspects and challenges of Polish patriotism, it is necessary to underline the irreplaceable role of the family. In our history, especially when there was no free Polish state, the family was the most important school of patriotism. Even today, in a free Republic, the privilege and moral duty of creating and moulding our patriotic character, similar to the transmission of faith and upbringing, rest above all with the family.

Because it is in the reality of family life, during which everyday challenges, hardships and concerns have to be met and overcome, that we come to appreciate the deeper meaning of love, honesty, responsibility, sacrifice and devotion, upon which patriotism is based. It is within the family and its particular intimacy that we witness such values as connection and solidarity, faith and community. These unique attributes of our families, which embody the entire richness of human existence, teach us the moral dimension of our actions – including social and patriotic ones: that actions should be based solely on an ideological programme, but should also consider the well-being of those actual people who live alongside us. In these unrepeatable actions of every family, national history is entwined with the local specifics of small national and life choices of individual people, creating a vibrant, rich and varied patriotism. It is in our families that we develop our personality, discover our abilities and talents, learn to trust in our own strength, shape an openness and honesty towards the world, all of which over times transforms us into active citizens.

For all these reasons, the family should enjoy the support of society, and national and local government, and its educational role, competence and responsibility

should lie at the heart of the education system. Also for these reasons, we harbour the hope that we as parents, grandparents and relatives will not avoid spending time with our children to share our faith and experience and also our knowledge about the histories of our families and our communities. Thanks to this love of community which we teach in our families, a mature patriotism will blossom in the public sphere, as will civic involvement, social and economic creativity, honesty, diligence, responsibility and solidarity.

**10. The role of school.** The natural support and partner of the family in forming the face of patriotism should be the Polish school. Historical experience shows us how important and fruitful can be the labour of Polish teachers, who over the generations have imbued into Poles a mature form of patriotism. This special mission of schools, teaching the young generation about our native land, its history, current state, culture, economy, and place in Europe and the modern world, is still relevant. However, today in the so-called information society which inundates us with an ever greater wave of varied, and sometimes unchecked and overly simplified, news, the challenge is not only acquiring information but also – and maybe more importantly – the ability to check, organise and understand it. It is, therefore, important that at school young Poles familiarise themselves with the topic of the native land, but also learn how to search out reliable sources of information and how to recognise real authorities and values. In addition, they need to develop a respect for our national heritage which will enable them independently to build an accurate picture of Polish culture, history and public life, and of the challenges lying before Poland. Thus, they can learn how to become

creative and productive and make an active contribution to their country in their adult lives. For school is also the sphere of social education, a place where we realise in practice the values we bring from home. It is here that we learn comradeship, respect for our elders, to help the weak, teamwork and respect for others' beliefs and ideas; that is, the traits and values upon which rests mature patriotism.

Thus, we are convinced that in collaboration with parents teachers will continue to competently and willingly shape the national identity of future generations of Poles. We believe that an important role in this great task will be played by school teaching of religion, which adds to social knowledge the priceless dimension of love for one's own. We finally hope that local and central government will create ever better conditions to aid the fulfilment of the important and responsible mission of Polish schools and their teachers.

**11. The task of people of culture.** Regarding patriotism and national identity, one should not forget the responsibility of artists, and people from the cultural and media spheres whose privilege and task it is to search out appropriate means of expression, form and symbol, thanks to which we – as a great and varied national community – can communicate and together live through our experiences, concerns and hopes.

The phenomenon of globalisation presents those people and creators of culture with their most important task, that is teaching the next generation of Poles about the events of our history, and also of the beauty of the Polish lands and the incomparable expression of Polish literature, music, art, film and theatre. The profound social and technological changes of today summon an especially important

challenge in their search for an approach language of expression and the symbiosis of high and mass culture. Thanks to this process, the great tradition of Polish culture and priceless experience of previous generations meet the experiences of today and the hopes and concerns of the youngest generations.

Therefore, we hope that in this difficult and responsible mission concerning national identity Polish artists will enjoy the support of the whole of society and also of local and central government.

**12. Scouting, local government and non-governmental organisations.** In terms of shaping a patriotic character, we would also like to focus on the important role of community organisations. Especially important in the service of our country is the scouting movement. During World War II Polish scouts embodied a unique model of patriotism and added the most glorious pages of their history. So, the educational engagement of thousands of boys and girls linking successive generations of Poles in the beautiful tradition of service to God, Poland and neighbour represents simultaneously a school of comradeship, responsibility and self-reliance. It is therefore worthwhile for public authorities to support existing scout troops, while at the same time creating conditions to encourage the establishment of others.

An important role in this respect is also to be played by other community and non-governmental organisations: charities, tourist clubs, environmental groups, historical associations, readers' groups, sports' clubs, societies promoting local identity and culture. All these social initiatives, which often stand apart from the political divide, create a civic society, build national solidarity and a sense

of community and are close to the beauty of our native landscape, culture and tradition and act as a school of Polish patriotism. And all these deserve respect and support.

In this context, we should also value the role of local councils. It is they who bear the responsibility for the everyday shape of our local community life, including Polish schools, and they are answerable for the patriotic education of the young generation. Local councils, often across the political divide, accept the task of respectfully raising awareness and commemorating national anniversaries and heroes. Also, it these very local councils who cultivate local forms of patriotism and identity, thanks to which Polishness finds its expression in the whole richness and variety of our small country.

**13. Patriotism and sport.** Speaking of those areas of society responsible for the shape of Polish patriotism, one should not overlook its connection with sport. It is worth mentioning that at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries Polish sporting associations were established in Krakow, Warsaw and Lwow and also Upper Silesia and these strengthened Poles' national awareness. It should also be noted that in today's world great sporting events represent a significant arena for fostering national identity and demonstrating patriotism. The great masses of fans following the performances of their teams are not only looking for emotion and a sporting spectacle, but they also demonstrate and express a sense of national community, pride and solidarity. This positive community-building role of sport is also evidenced at a local level, teaching loyalty, self-reliance and allegiance to one's club's colours and symbols.

Recognising and evaluating all this, it is difficult not to notice that sports' stadiums are sometimes places of

conflict and aggression, even on ethnic lines. Unfortunately, it happens that, when expressing their emotions and their loyalty to their team, fans insult others. So, we wish to stress here that it is important, especially for the young generation in the public sphere, that national and also local patriotism should never be seen as a justification for enmity, contempt or aggression.

Therefore we also direct a request to competitors, trainers and sports' officials that they show the young generation that sport is not only a field of competition and rivalry, but that it is a space for fair play, friendship, commitment and respect for one's opponents.

**14. Historical re-enactments.** Writing about national memory and the political history supporting it, we would also like to mention the increasingly popular, not only in Poland, phenomenon of historical re-enactments. In these days of popular and visual culture it is hard not to recognise their value. These well planned and designed events, supported by public bodies and staged by history buffs have the ability, just like interactive museums, to arouse and reinforce the interest of especially the young generation in our national history.

However, caution is advised. When preparing such re-enactments one needs to remember the mystery of human death and suffering, fear and heroism, the dignity and wonder of which cannot always be captured and presented in mass, open-air spectacles. It is also necessary to remember that such events, which are of necessity symbolic and simplified, cannot encapsulate all the drama and sometimes threat and horror of the historical situations they recall. This, in turn, risks leading to oversimplification. This also relates to national and patriotic symbols

and signs, out of loyalty to which our fellow country have more than once paid the ultimate price. This should not be trivialised; rather, it should be approached with respect and reverence.

From the Christian point of view, it is necessary to stress that war, although often witness to human greatness and heroism, is not simply a colourful story or adventure; rather, it is a drama full of suffering and evil, which should always be avoided.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we would once more like to thank all those thanks to whom Polish patriotism still endures and is still so vibrant. At the same time, we want to stress that the great lesson of Polish patriotism is that it is not acquired by teaching alone but also by active participation. Poland was, is and should remain a symbol of solidarity, openness and hospitality for modern Europe and the world.

Therefore, we appeal again to parents, teachers, representatives of the public and political authorities, civil servants and officers in national services, local government officials, creators of culture and people of the media, pastors, catechists, scout leaders, community activists, historical re-enactors and sportsmen lest they shy away from their role in shaping our Polish patriotism which is honourable and based on Christian love for those closest to us.

We would also like to declare and express our conviction that the Catholic Church in Poland, as it has done throughout history, will – using the means at its disposal – value and support such activities.

Document accepted at the 375th Plenary Meeting  
of the Polish Episcopal Conference

Warsaw, 14 March 2017



Contemporary peripheries, or new socio-cultural environments, are a challenge for the Church to understand and to engage with in dialogue in a spirit of respect for the dignity of every human being. Church structures are such as to enable evangelization rather than to preserve the status quo. In order to make the Church's teaching more refined, it should also make use of the social sciences whose guiding principles would offer support in its fulfilment of the mission entrusted to it by Christ (see Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 27, 30, 40).

To fulfil this task, the Archbishop of Wrocław, Joseph Kupny, established the **Social Observatory Foundation (Obserwatorium Społeczne)**.



---

Fundacja Obserwatorium Społeczne

The Social Observatory is a Christian think tank that aims to analyse social reality, new and emerging cultural trends, as well as political and economic ones. The Foundation serves to make social diagnoses, especially recognizing new challenges and dangers, as well as anticipating the way the Church could react to contemporary changes in the spirit of its encounter with the world. The reflections and activities of the Social Observatory are aimed at reinforcing the axiological foundations of society. An important part of the activity of the Social Observatory is the promotion of the social teaching of the Church and the guiding and education of society in accordance with the principles proposed by Catholic social teaching.

Bearing in mind the history of Wrocław, the Social Observatory serves the idea of reconciliation, not by eliminating existing differences, but through dialogue between religions, cultures, peoples and social groups.

The scholars, experts, analysts, authors and journalists assembled by the Social Observatory intend to initiate and co-create public debate. By working with other centres, the Observatory wants to build bridges between different actors in the social sphere and contribute to an improvement in the quality of public life.

The Social Observatory harks back to the traditions of Wrocław's social sciences, and particularly the figure of Fr. Professor Joseph Majka, who initiated sociological research into religiousness in Poland led by the Church's centres and who was the undisputed authority in the field of religious sociology and Catholic social science.

### **Goals of the Social Observatory**

- Promoting the inalienable dignity of the human being
- Promoting Catholic social science
- Supporting the development of democracy, the rule of law, a social market economy and corporate social responsibility
- Supporting marriage and the family, and social and demographic policies
- Supporting reconciliation, understanding and dialogue in social life
- Inspiring, organizing and conducting academic research in the social and philosophical sciences

We would like to invite all those who wish to work with us in our pursuit of the aims of the Observatory to contact us. We are also open to dialogue with all who respect the dignity of every human being.

Fundacja Obserwatorium Społeczne

Plac Katedralny 1

50-329 Wrocław

Tel: 713 074 237

e-mail: [fundacja@obserwatoriumspoleczne.pl](mailto:fundacja@obserwatoriumspoleczne.pl)

[www.obserwatoriumspoleczne.pl](http://www.obserwatoriumspoleczne.pl)