



# Department of Justice

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BY

HONORABLE ROBERT F. KENNEDY

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

at the

Polish Roman Catholic Union Convention

Lord Baltimore Hotel

Baltimore, Maryland

Monday, September 17, 1962

Mr. Chairman, Reverend Fathers, officers and delegates to the Polish Roman Catholic Union Convention:

The one characteristic which distinguishes us as Americans in the world today is that in the United States we have a land of 180 million people whose cultures and background come from virtually every nation in the world, and yet we live virtually as one people.

I am particularly happy to be with you here today to participate in the opening session of your convention because Americans, regardless of ethnic background, will agree that the Polish Roman Catholic Union, through its eighty-nine years of existence, has made an indelible contribution to the growth of America.

Over the years you have assisted Polish immigrants make an orderly transition from the customs of the old world to those of our country. Your efforts have helped these people become dedicated Americans and made your communities across the country better places in which to live.

Although Poland is a much older nation than the United States, our destinies have been closely and profitably intertwined.

A few years after its founding, Jamestown, the first permanent settlement in America, was in trouble. The gentlemen adventurers who formed Captain John Smith's company had little taste for the hard task of building a colony in a hostile wilderness. They were more interested in vain searches for gold than in clearing stubborn forests or ploughing fields.

Smith sent to London for help. He asked for men who would work and who had the skills necessary to create a civilization in the wilderness.

The next ship brought help, not more gentlemen seeking a quick fortune, but six skilled craftsmen -- Lowicki, Stefanski, Mata, Bogdan, Zrencia and Sadioski.

These first six poles in the new world went to work. They established a glass furnace--the first industry in America--and helped the colony to start a soap works and a saw mill. John Smith credited their example of skill and industry with saving Jamestown.

A few years later, when the colony was to elect the first representative legislature in America, the governor ruled that only those born in England could vote. The poles promptly put down their tools and proclaimed "No vote, no work." The governor relented and the annals of the Jamestown colony for 1619 note that poles were extended the full rights accorded other settlers.

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It is not surprising that this first strike in America was by poles and that it was staged in the name of freedom.

The Polish love of freedom served this nation well then and in the Revolution. The names of Pulaski and Kosciusko brighten the pages of our history.

Pulaski died in an attack on the British at Savannah after distinguished service at the Battle of Brandywine and at Valley Forge. But Kosciusko lived to serve the cause of freedom both here and in Poland long after the War.

A large cash award and a valuable tract of land were bestowed upon him by a grateful congress, but he never used this bounty for himself. Before leaving to fight again for Polish freedom in 1794, he placed his will in the hands of Thomas Jefferson.

That last testament, as did his entire life, struck a blow for freedom and human dignity. It directed that his estate be used to buy Negro slaves and set them free.

Down through the years, Americans and Poles have shared the burden of fighting for freedom. Several years ago, I climbed that steep, rocky Italian hillside where Polish troupes, under General Wladyslaw Anders, took Monte Cassino from the Nazis, climaxing some of the hardest fighting of the second World War.

I shall never forget the inscription on the memorial to the Polish soldiers buried there:

"We Polish soldiers, for our freedom and yours, have given our souls to God, our bodies to the soil of Italy and our hearts to Poland."

On the day the Poles captured Monte Cassino, American GI's were moving forward through the hills on their left and the Americans who died in that battle are buried a few miles from their Polish brothers.

This has been the theme of the relationship between the Polish and the American peoples--working and fighting together in the cause of freedom.

Time after time, Americans have been inspired by the stubborn courage of the Poles. We cannot forget that at the outset of the second World War, Polish cavalrymen charged their horses against Nazi tanks.

Nor can we forget General Bor's uprising against the Germans in Warsaw, holding out for sixty-three days against the might of the German Occupation Force.

We have been able to make partial payment on the debt we owe to the sons of Pulaski and Kosciusko.

Nor have we forgotten our friend in the troubled days since the second World War. We welcome and support the advances that have taken place in recent years.

We will continue to be concerned for the welfare of the Polish people and to maintain our traditional close ties of friendship with them.

I am happy that this Government has been able to extend over a half billion dollars in assistance to the Polish people in the past five years, and I am happy that this program is going to continue. This aid has been supplemented by the fine work of private organizations and citizens who have been sending generous assistance since the War.

American private and Government aid and assistance joined to build the new children's hospital which is nearing completion in Kracow.

We have invited leaders of the Polish Government and leaders of thought and opinion in Poland to visit America and see this land for themselves.

Cultural exchanges are continuing to increase. The Warsaw Philharmonic and the Polish Folk Dance groups have toured this country. A band from Warsaw played at the Washington, D. C. and Newport jazz festivals this summer.

Our program of exchanging students, teachers and technicians is continuing and I hope it will grow as both nations can benefit from it.

Each year, more and more American tourists are going to Poland. I hope that trend will increase and will flow both ways so that more Poles will visit us and see America.

These exchanges are but tangible evidence of the close bond between the people of Poland and the people of the United States.

Today, more than ever before, we need the courage and dedication to freedom which have made Americans and Poles such good friends through their history.

We face a resourceful foe who seeks to impose his Totalitarian way on free men everywhere. The threat takes many forms. It may be a wall in Berlin, occupied domination of proud old nations, guerrilla warfare in Southeast Asia, military aid to Cuba, or espionage in our own country.

We are alert to this threat and as President Kennedy said last week, we intend to do everything within our power to meet it--and our power is very great.

We are making a consistent, carefully planned effort to turn the arms race into a peace race to spread respect for the rule of law, and dedication to man's God-given right to be free.

We are convinced that a supreme effort must be made to halt the arms race, but until some progress is made, we are and will remain prepared to do what is necessary to protect our own interests and the security of our friends and allies.

As we face this challenge through the difficult years ahead, another of the great attributes of the Polish people--their loyalty and devotion to the Roman Catholic Church--will serve us well.

Poles are now celebrating their 1,000th anniversary as a Christian people. Think of it--40 generations of Faith.

Ten centuries of Christianity have given the Polish people a collective dynamism and a sense of great continuing national purpose. Indeed, the birth of Poland as a nation is closely tied to the arrival of Christianity and its long and proud history has continued this close bond to the Church.

We have a rich heritage of our own--revolution, toughness, industry and unswerving belief in the fundamental rights of the individual--but we are a young nation. We look back to many lands for our basic beliefs and traditions.

The Poles brought to this country strength, courage, faith and perserverance--and America is indebted to its Polish citizens for helping to forge our national character with this steel.

A thousand years of history shows beyond a doubt that the spirit of freedom and human dignity is so ingrained in the Polish soul that no tyrant will ever succeed in destroying them.

I know from my own experience, for on the same trip that I saw the monument at Monte Cassino, I also visited Poland. I came there from the Soviet Union, and it was inspiring to enter a country where the people yearn for the principles of freedom and meaningful Democracy. It was like emerging from darkness into the sunshine.

During those thousand years, Poland has been conquered and partitioned six times. Yet, Poland has never lost its concept as a nation. Stubbornly and passionately, the poles have clung to their determination to be free. They have refused to quit. They have always come back.

This is the strength and tradition of the Polish character. This is your heritage.

So, it is a privilege to be here for not only do I feel a close bond with the Polish People, but the President shares this regard and feeling. His sister-in-law is married to a Pole. The President has visited Poland as has my Mother, my brother, Ted, and my sisters. With ... virtually no other group has my family had a closer affiliation.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, speaking on Memorial Day, 1884, in Keene, New Hampshire, said:

"It is required of a man that he should share the passions and actions of his time at the peril of being judged not to have lived."

I can think of no other people who have shared the passions and actions of their time as have the Poles.

I hope you will have a successful conference and that you will return to your homes with renewed dedication to our common ideals of freedom and human dignity.

And I know you share with me the conviction that Poles everywhere are dedicated to these ideals and that they will triumph, for imbedded throughout the pages of Polish history and our own is the slogan which is apt today -- "Polak nie sluga" -- A Pole--and I might add an American--will never be a serf.