

John Paul II and Opposition Activities in Soviet Bloc Countries

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Abstract:

The purpose of this article is to present the role of Pope John Paul II in the overthrow of the Communist system in Central Europe based primarily on the scientific literature on the subject and the published documents. The author's attention is focused, for obvious reasons, on Poland, as well as on neighbouring countries with a significant number of Catholics within their borders: Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the Republic of Lithuania within the Soviet Union. John Paul II's visit to the People's Republic of Poland on 2–10 June 1979 went down in history as "nine days that changed the world". The pilgrimage was the catalyst for changes in social awareness in Poland, leading to the creation of Solidarity in 1980. In the following years, the pope sustained the spirit of resistance in Polish society during the harsh period of martial law and beyond. Under his inspiration, the church played a mediating role in the 1989 Round Table talks between the authorities and the opposition. The election of Karol Wojtyła, a cardinal from a neighbouring country, and the subsequent activities of the new pope had a profound impact on the revival of the religious life of Catholics in Czechoslovakia and Lithuania. Breaking the barrier of fear resulted in more substantial involvement of Catholics in opposition activities. The revival of the Church in Hungary was less successful, but the personality and teaching of John Paul II encouraged Catholics in that country, too, in opposition activities against the Communist regime.

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