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THE CRUSADE OF JOHN PAUL II

Pope John Paul II's recent visit to his native Poland had two obvious purposes: to see his countrymen and and stir their religious enthusiasm and to challenge the government.

The Pope's concern for his people and religion in the Communist state is the first involvement by a modern Pontiff in political or social affairs. He is not merely a stagnant symbol; today's head of the Catholic Church is using his potential influence in a way that can benefit mankind.

John Paul's demands for the end of oppression of Catholicism and his defense of universal human rights have made the Soviet-backed government wary. A religious fervor has swept the country (a phenomenon called "Papalmania" by one church official) which includes the Polish youth, who are the key to the future of all Communist states.

Because of this show of Church power, the government is desperately

trying to downplay the whole affair. It has changed the Pope's agenda and forbidden him to visit very religious areas, all of which is designed to detract from the impact of the visit. In one case, party thugs stole bleachers which were to be used at one of the papal stops. The Polish Catholics (90% of the country's population) are unified in their religious excitement, however, and none of this has dampened their enthusiasm.

Religious freedom in Poland, though not endorsed by the government, is protected. This element, directed and utilized by the Pope, has permitted the mobilization of the people (something which almost never occurs in Communist states) behind their faith. This freedom of expression, although limited to religious areas, has permitted the Pope, the most influential non-government figure in Poland, to speak out in defense of human rights and attack the present state of Communism.

This attack is not meant to bring about the destruction of Communism. The Pope sees it as criticism to help church-state relations in Poland. The Catholic Church and the faith people have in it is quite possibly the only way for the masses to voice opinions and bring about change in the oppressive society in which they live. Indeed, these events could be the building blocks of the withering away of the state as Marx predicted and the creation of a truly Marxist society.

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