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## **John Paul II – Doctor Honoris Causa at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland**

To successfully mark the significance of the ceremony awarding John Paul II the title of doctorate *honoris causa* at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań in 2001, the awareness of the local community about the beginnings of academic education in this city seems worth mentioning. Regardless of the date chosen – whether it is the Bishop’s School created at the turn of the 10<sup>th</sup> century to educate future members of clergy, the Academia established by Bp. Jan Lubrański, or the well-known Jesuits College, which in 1611 the Polish king Sigismund III Vasa granted a privilege that elevated the school to the rank of university, later confirmed by John III Sobieski – the main element of this awareness and the indicator of the academic identity is its connection to the Latin civilization, meaning the inalienable relationship with the Catholic civilization.

Thus, the doctorate *honoris causa* should be perceived as a confirmation of this identity on the one hand, and as paying respects to the great compatriot on the other. The latter was emphasized by the main inspirer and organizer of the honor, Prof. Stefan Jurga, then Rector of the University during the ceremony. He contends: “conferring the degree of doctor *honoris causa* of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań to Pope John Paul II was paying tribute to the great Polish man who, by means of his intellectual and spiritual ministry, put the human in the center of attention of the contemporary world.”<sup>1</sup> The identity

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<sup>1</sup> S. Jurga, *W hołdzie Janowi Pawłowi II – doktorat honoris causa UAM*, in: *Jan Paweł II – Doktor Honorowy UAM*, eds. B. Walczak, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2014, p. 95.

of Poznań's university tradition and the willingness to pay respects to the Great Pope, the promoter of the deepest humanism, were the basis for the decision of awarding John Paul II the doctorate *honoris causa*.

The process connected with the decision about the act of conferring this title can be tracked with much precision. According to the clear testimony by the Rector of the University in Poznań, Prof. Stefan Jurga, the direct impulse to undertake efforts in this regard was the reactivation of the Faculty of Theology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań in 1998.<sup>2</sup> This is when the thought to “survey” the opinion about the potential agreement of the Pope to this form of honouring his legacy seems to have crystalized. It was not a mere matter of courtesy, as the Pope's speech delivered to academic circles from the Catholic University of Lublin well-recalled: “Since you have chosen to award me the doctorate *honoris causa ex universa* today, I accept it regardless the fact that it is not in accordance to the tradition of my service... Let ... my decision be a sign of deep respect and support I treat Academia with.”<sup>3</sup>

As Prof. Stefan Jurga emphasized, the process was initiated by a conversation with Prof. Jan Kanty Pytel, the former Dean of the Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Poznań dated to the beginning of the Jubilee Year 2000. Confirming the significance and purposefulness of this endeavour, as well as the conviction that the Pope would approve the title, constituted an additional impulse for further actions undertaken in this respect. An informal request is said to have been made to the Holy Father between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> May 2000. The Pope is reported to have favourably answered this proposition as the same time suggesting the year 2001, after the celebrations connected with Holy Year, as the more suitable date for this occasion.<sup>4</sup>

Another step was the Rector's meeting with the Convention of Honorary Guests including Professors Janusz Pajewski, Zdzisław Pająk, Jerzy Konarski, Józef Skrzypczak, Hubert Orłowski, and Henryk Olszewski in June 2000. According to Prof. Stefan Jurga, the Convention “enthusiastically supported this idea.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. S. Jurga, *W hołdzie Janowi Pawłowi II – doktorat honoris causa UAM*, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup> Jan Paweł II, *Przemówienie w czasie uroczystości nadania doktoratu honoris causa Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego*, Warszawa 7.06.1983.

<sup>4</sup> 2Cf. S. Jurga, *W hołdzie Janowi Pawłowi II – doktorat honoris causa UAM*, p. 99.

<sup>5</sup> S. Jurga, *W hołdzie Janowi Pawłowi II – doktorat honoris causa UAM*, p. 100.



fot. „L'Osservatore Romano” 2001

At this point, a remark, somehow self-evident yet significant, for the proper understanding of procedures has to be made. Adam Mickiewicz University has always been a pluralist university comprising of academics with various beliefs and convictions. This diversity was particularly noticeable in 1998 – during the time of reactivation of the Faculty of Theology. The analysis of the discussion that took place back then implies a significant polarization in the debate around the relationship between the Church and academia, the presence of theology at university, and, finally, the relation between faith and science.

Mentioning that debate, even briefly, seems necessary to understand the significance of the events initiated by the Rector, Prof. Stefan Jurga. His intention was to not only gain approval of the pluralist academic circles but also their acclamation for the absolutely exceptional Candidate. Thus, before acquiring the official position of the University in this respect, the Rector had multiple unofficial conversations with influential representatives of the academia as well as discussions with Deans from each faculty during the meeting in Obrzycko on 11 September 2000. The idea to begin the procedures leading to the Pope's doctorate at Adam Mickiewicz University was made concrete by the Rector, notwithstanding, the process was widely supported by representatives of all faculties.

Prof. Stefan Jurga's exceptional talent for organization and his great personal charisma resulted in gaining approval in this matter from each faculty by the end of 2000 and the proposal was officially unanimously accepted by the Senate on 29 January 2001. The Rector emphasized that "the approval was preceded by a very fruitful discussion I have never experienced throughout the 15 years I spent as a member of the Senate at our University."<sup>6</sup>

The proposal to confer the title of doctorate *honoris causa* to John Paul II given by the Rector, Prof. Stefan Jurga and the Senate emphasized the universal and over-denominational merits granted by the Pope to the intellectual and spiritual culture of the contemporary world, as well as its Slavic and Polish *par excellence* dimension: "This great Pope has always remained an dedicated patriot. He incessantly strives for the inclusion of the Polish and Slavic cultural heritage in Europe. It is John Paul II who pronounced the apostles and teachers of Slavic people, Saints Cyril and Methodius to be the patrons of Europe, along with Saint Benedict. It is the Polish Pope who believes in and continuously promotes the saying about the two lungs of Christian Europe: Roman Catholic and Eastern Catholic Church. There is no denying that thanks to him, Poland and Slavic Europe gained cultural prestige in the cultural world."<sup>7</sup>

The resolution of the Senate of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2001 unequivocally responded to the proposal: "The Senate of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, upon request of the Rector and the Convention of Honorary Guests, supported unanimously by every faculty of the University, and after consulting the opinion of reviewers assigned by the Senate, unanimously decides by acclamation that the title of doctor *honoris causa* will be granted to His Eminence Holy Father John Paul II, upon the Pope's prior agreement, to honour the multiple merits his Persona has brought to the world of science, culture, Church, nation and the whole mankind. The Senate acknowledges the Pope's role as an exceptional philosopher, theologian, priest, statesman, patriot who has become the greatest authority of the contemporary world."<sup>8</sup>

In the Rector's efforts undertaken in this respect, Prof. Stefan Jurga received significant support from his fellow colleagues, Professors Stanisław Lorenc,

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<sup>6</sup> S. Jurga, *W hołdzie Janowi Pawłowi II – doktorat honoris causa UAM*, p. 100.

<sup>7</sup> *Wniosek JM Rektora i Senatu w sprawie nadania doktoratu honoris causa Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu Jego Świątobliwości Ojcu Świętemu Janowi Pawłowi II*, in: *Joannes Paulus Papa II. Doctor honoris causa*, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> As cited in: *Joannes Paulus Papa II. Doctor honoris causa*, p. 19.

Joachim Cieślak, Przemysław Hauser, Bogdan Walczak, and Bronisław Marciniak. In addition, the approval of the Deans including Prof. Andrzej Dobek (Faculty of Physics), Henryk Koroniak (Faculty of Chemistry), Stanisław Puppel (Faculty of Neophilology), Andrzej Zieliński (Faculty of Law and Administration), priest Tomasz Węclawski (Faculty of Theology), Zbiegniew Palka (Faculty of Mathematics and Information Technology), Andrzej Kostrzewski (Faculty of Geography and Geology), Kazimierz Ziemnicki (Faculty of Biology), Kazimierz Przyszczypkowski (Faculty of Educational Studies), Janusz Wiśniewski (Faculty of Social Sciences), Antoni Smuszkiwicz (Faculty of Polish and Classical Philology), and Tomasz Jasiński (Faculty of History) was particularly important.<sup>9</sup>

Reviews emphasizing John Paul II's merits for the world of culture, and both Polish and international science were prepared by the Pro-Rector Prof. Bogdan Walczak representing Adam Mickiewicz University<sup>10</sup> and Prof. Władysław Stróżewski from Jagiellonian University. The latter highlighted a significant reference point bridging the degree for John Paul II and another doctorate honoris causa degree given by Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań before WWII for Prof. Kazimierz Twardowski. "When Kazimierz Twardowski received the title of doctor honoris causa of Poznań University, he directed to the Senate his well-known lecture titled *The dignity of the University*. It elaborates on the institution of the university in general, however there is no denying that the first and main addressee of the essay is Poznań University."<sup>11</sup> One can thus notice the particular iunctim between the lecture about the dignity of university with the realization of this dignity by means of rewarding John Paul II with the greatest academic recognition as he is the great and, as a result of the Universal Church's ruling, saintly person.

The solemn ceremony of conferring the doctor *honoris causa* degree took place on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2001 in Vatican. The participants included the Academic Senate in gremium, representatives of government authorities from Wielkopolska

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. S. Jurga, *W holdzie Janowi Pawłowi II – doktorat honoris causa UAM*, pp. 100-101.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. B. Walczak, *Opinia w sprawie wniosku o nadanie doktoratu honoris causa Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu Jego Świątobliwości Ojcu Świętemu Janowi Pawłowi II*, in: *Joannes Paulus Papa II. Doctor honoris causa Universitatis Studiorum Mickiewiczianae Poznaniensis*, Poznań 2001, pp. 44-56.

<sup>11</sup> W. Stróżewski, *Opinia dotycząca nadania Jego Świątobliwości Ojcu Świętemu Janowi Pawłowi II doktoratu honoris causa Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu*, in: *Joannes Paulus Papa II. Doctor honoris causa*, p. 43.

Region and Poznań, the Metropolitan of Poznań, two academic choirs, as well as invited honorary guests.

The laudation delivered by Prof. Stefan Jurga, the Rector of Adam Mickiewicz University emphasized the fact that any attempt to synthetically describe any aspect of St. John Paul II's activity is susceptible to certain difficulties: "Any attempt to characterize the Persona of Holy Father and his legacy is at the very start incomplete and incomprehensive. John Paul II is such an original and versatile thinker, an outstanding philosopher and theologian, a man of science addressing its various fields on general level. He is a person interested in the ethical basis of science, and aware of its current and future challenges and threats. The Holy Father is also a great humanist, expert, theoretician, co-creator of culture, inspired poet and author of reflective poetry, meditative poems, and touching dramas. First and foremost though, he is a charismatic shepherd of the Universal Church who preaches values derived from the Decalogue and Gospel. At the same time, he shows great love and cordial solidarity to any human being. [...] He is a great Pope who introduced the Church into the new millennium of its history – the Pope of dialogue with the contemporary world and openness to every race, peoples, and nations, a considerate continuator of the renewal of the Church, the tireless apostle of ecumenism to reunite with the brothers and sisters separated from the Church, the initiator of reconciliation with the followers of Judaism and other followers and worshippers of the only deity, the restorer of the social teachings of the Church, which defends the poor and needy, and directs their help and words of cordial compassion to all victims of war, misery, sickness, catastrophes, and natural disasters. John Paul II is the conscience of the contemporary world. [...].

He is a great statesman, advocate of the world peace, friendship, and cooperation among nations, whole pleas and initiatives undertaken in the name of the well-being of the whole human family meet with the understanding and response of the whole international community. He is the greatest authority of the contemporary world at the dawn of the new millennium, acknowledged even by those who agree with all of his views and opinions. [...]

Finally, John Paul II is the devoted Polish patriot shaped by the values of Polish culture who deeply loves the motherland and his comrades from the Polish soil. His Polish roots are often and willingly mentioned by him, particularly in reference to their cultural dimension. Thanks to his authority, and the depth and vastness of the impact he makes, John Paul II introduces the spiritual legacy of his forefathers to the repository of the humanity's cultural heritage. He is also

the advocate of the cultural importance of our Slavic brothers and other friends and neighbours from Eastern and Central Europe who are linked with us either historically or community-wise to a smaller or greater degree.”<sup>12</sup>

The synthetic outline of topics connected to the persona, philosophy, and scope of activities of John Paul II summarized by the Rector can be viewed as a frame of pontifical inspirations undertaken at the University of Poznań (such as efforts from the field of linguistics, theology, cultural studies or the activity of Collegium Eurpaeum UAM in Gniezno), as well as constituting a certain impulse shaping the research interests of the academic community.

John Paul II, in his response to the laudation speech said: “Even though my direct contacts with the University in Poznań were not frequent, I have always felt a particular connection to this place. The academic community created around this University, to my mind, can be perceived as an important center of the development of our national culture. At this point, the words of Adam Poszwiński uttered during the ceremony of opening the University in 1919 seem worth citing: ‘We wish that our alumni will not only be brave professionals but also citizens of a great national heart and spirit, people of the clear understanding of civil service who would view their occupation as a way to serve the nation.’ If so, if the care of the spiritual well-being of the nation is the basic principle of this University, AMU will always be dear to my heart.

The spiritual good of the nation should be seen in the perspective of the coming-together of Europe. And here the role of Piastowska Wszechnica cannot be overestimated. During my pastoral visit in Poznań in 1983, I spoke about the significant role that the city played in the creation of the Polish culture as it took, predominantly, the Western European form (20.06.1983).

Starting with the early beginnings under bp. Jan Lubrański and later bp. Adam Konarski until now, your University actively and effectively has taken part in the efforts to build bridges between the heritage of Piasts, Jagiellonians, later époques and the spirit of Europe. I believe that the University of Poznań also in the future, will be a place where the Polish culture, well-grounded in its identity, and the European culture, respectable to its universal values, meet.”<sup>13</sup>

It seems worth mentioning that in his synthetic speech, St. John Paul II skilfully reminded his listeners of the historical academic tradition of Poland, recalled the idea behind the creation of the University – the conception revealed

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<sup>12</sup> *Laudation of the Rector Prof. Dr. Hab. Stefan Jurga*, 26 March 2001.

<sup>13</sup> *Speech by His Holiness, Holy Father John Paul II*, 26 March 2001.

during the establishing of *Wsztechnica Piastowska* in 1919 – and highlighted the significance of AMU in the development of the national identity in the perspective of the European identity.

The Pontifical speech, very characteristically, allows its addressees to recall the events which took place one hundred years ago. The ceremony of opening the university is dated to 7<sup>th</sup> May 1919. Rector Święcicki proposed this date during the meeting of the Commission on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1918. The date was not coincidental as it seems to be directly related to the tradition of *Lubrański Academia* dated back then at 400 years. According to the widespread consensus, manifested in relevant speeches, this tradition still sustains a continuum.

The opening of the University was accompanied by crowds of citizens of Poznań who formed a large march after the Cathedral Mass celebrated by Abp. Edmund Dalbor. The march from the Cathedral moved to *Chwaliszewo* and *Wielka Street*, then through the *Old Town* and *New Street* (known as *Paderewskiego Street* today), *Liberty Square*, *Kościuszki* and *St. Marcin Street* all the way to *Collegium Maius*, which was then located in the Castle. In the former imperial throne room, the main part of the inauguration took place.

That was the room in which words of Commissioner *Poszwiński* were uttered, which were cited by St. John Paul II in his speech. The Pope's words were not only a reference to that ceremony but also its updated version. They emphatically pointed to the formational merit of the University, its cultural, social, and political mission (where politics is understood in the Aristotelian sense of the word as a wise care of the common good). Finally, recalling the history of the University from the years of resurgent Poland indicated the patriotic value of the University and the academia broadly understood.

The Pontifical words, in line with the expectations, were a synthetic but also emphatic promotion of the Poznań's academic community and the very city of Poznań. As it was mentioned by Prof. *Stefan Jurga* "this doctorate was not needed by the Pope. It was our community which needed this exceptional recognition. By means of conferring this degree to John Paul II, we aimed to show our academic achievements and the richness of our spiritual and intellectual values to the world. Moreover, we wished to meet the Holy Father in person.

We wanted the world to see Poznań through the prism of its thousand-year-old history, through the Poznań's Cathedral with the tombs of the first Polish emperors and kings, through the academic structures, starting from the school operating at the Cathedral, through Bp. *Lubrański's Academia*, the Jesuits

College, which in 1611 was elevated to the rank of university to the University of Poznań built upon the ruins of Prussian Partition in 1918.

We wanted the world to see Poznań, which did not allow the Pope to kneel by the June 1956 Monument (the so-called Poznań's Crosses) during the pontifical visit in Poznań in 1983, and made up for it later during another pastoral visit of the Pope in Poznań in 1997.

Through this doctorate, we wanted to show the academic Poznań with the sheer number of students. We felt a need coming from the depths of our hearts to pay respects to our Holy Father, John Paul II.<sup>14</sup>

One more detail should be highlighted. The Pontifical speech was very concise. Yet, it referred to the Faculty of Theology: "One more thought that comes to my mind. I would not like the importance of doctorate *honoris causa* to be limited only to my person. I accept this honour as a sign of the creative coexistence of science and religion and the fruitful cooperation of academic and ecclesiastical circles. It seems that this honour is particularly meaningful as all University Faculties advocated for granting me this title. I am content that recent Faculty of Theology has become one of them. Let this presence reveal the increasingly spiritual form of science, being open to infinity, and, at the same time, allow for discovering solid, scientific fundaments of faith."<sup>15</sup>

The Pope's words can thus be read as a sign of the integration of the academic community and, more broadly, as a plea for the symbiosis of faith and science, being on their way to discover the truth (Truth) in line with their specificity.

The ceremony, paying tribute to the Holy Father, which took place in the Clementine Hall included the artistic element – the performance of the representatives of two university choirs – the Academic Choir and the Poznań's Chamber Choir. One of the performed songs "Abba, Father," featuring Father Jan Góra OP, allowed for creating even a closer bridge between the person of John Paul II and the academic community. This bridge was achieved by means of recalling the annual spiritual and media presence of the Pope John Paul II during meetings with young people (in particular, university students) in Lednica.

At the end of the ceremony in Clementine Hall the Pope said: "I would be grateful if you could send my regards to all Professors, Students, and University Employees who were not able to be with us today. I keep you all in my

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<sup>14</sup> S. Jurga, *W hołdzie Janowi Pawłowi II*, p. 104.

<sup>15</sup> *Speech by His Holiness, Holy Father John Paul II, 26 March 2001*, in: *Joannes Paulus Papa II. Doctor honoriscausa*, op. cit.

heart and I pray for you. I pray God to deliver much blessings to you and the community of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.”

Years later, Rector Stefan Jurga believes that Pope’s wish came true. Right after the return from ceremonies in Vatican, those, who were absent in Rome could take part in “two concerts in the University Hall filled to the brim, during which we watched fragments of video footage from Vatican, accompanied by Wojciech Kilar’s music rendered by the Agnieszka Duczmal’s Chamber Orchestra and University’s choirs. We watched the Pope’s speech and listened to selected texts written by Holy Father, the laudation, as well as the reviews read by artists working in Poznań’s and Warsaw’s theaters.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> S. Jurga, *W hołdzie Janowi Pawłowi II*, p. 104.