

Remarks at the Dedication of the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center
March 22, 2001

Your Excellency, thank you very much. You will be pleased to hear, my mother is still telling me what to do. *[Laughter]* And I'm listening most of the time.

Cardinal Maida, thank you for your vision, and thank you for your smile. What a great smile. Cardinal Szoka, thank you very much for your hospitality. And Cardinal McCarrick, let me congratulate you on becoming a cardinal last month. Though we're both new to our jobs, I'm the only one who is term limited. *[Laughter]* I may be just passing through, and I may not be a parishioner, but I'm proud to live in your archdiocese. I'm pleased to join with all the church leaders and special guests here today to dedicate the cultural center. It is my high honor to be here.

When Cardinal Wojtyla spoke here at Catholic University in 1976, few imagined the course his life would take or the history his life would shape. In 1978 most of the world knew him only as the Polish Pope. There were signs of something different and deeper. One journalist, after hearing the new Pope's first blessing in St. Peter's Square, wired back to his editors: "This is not a Pope from Poland; this is a Pope from Galilee." From that day to this, the Pope's life has written one of the great inspiring stories of our time.

We remember the Pope's first visit to Poland in 1979, when faith turned into resistance and began the swift collapse of imperial communism. The gentle young priest once ordered into forced labor by Nazis became the foe of tyranny and a witness to hope. The last leader of the Soviet Union would call him "the highest moral authority on Earth."

We remember his visit to a prison, comforting the man who shot him. By answering violence with forgiveness, the Pope became a symbol of reconciliation.

We remember the Pope's visit to Manila in 1995, speaking to one of the largest crowds in history, more than 5 million men and women and children. We remember that as a priest 50 years ago, he traveled by horse-cart to teach the children of small villages. Now he's kissed the ground of 123 countries and leads a flock of one billion into the third millennium.

We remember the Pope's visit to Israel and his mission of reconciliation and mutual respect between Christians and Jews. He is the first modern Pope to enter a synagogue or visit an Islamic country. He has always combined the practice of tolerance with a passion for truth.

John Paul, himself, has often said, "In the designs of Providence, there are no mere coincidences." And maybe the reason this man became Pope is that he bears the message our world needs to hear.

To the poor, sick, and dying, he carries a message of dignity and solidarity with their suffering. Even when they are forgotten by men, he reminds them they are never forgotten by God. "Do not give in to despair," he said, in the South Bronx, "God has your lives in His care, goes with you, calls you to better things, calls you to overcome."

To the wealthy, this Pope carries the message that wealth alone is a false comfort. The goods of the world, he teaches, are nothing without goodness. We are called, each and every one of us, not only to make our own way but to ease the path of others.

To those with power, the Pope carries a message of justice and human rights. And that message has caused dictators to fear and to fall. His is not the power of armies or technology or wealth; it is the unexpected power of a baby in a stable, of a man on a cross, of a simple fisherman who carried a message of hope to Rome.

Pope John Paul II brings that message of liberation to every corner of the world. When he arrived in Cuba in 1998, he was greeted by signs that read, "Fidel is the Revolution!" But as the Pope's biographer put it, "In the next 4 days, Cuba belonged to another revolutionary." We are confident that the revolution of hope the Pope began in that nation will bear fruit in our time. And we're responsible to stand for human dignity and religious freedom wherever they are denied, from Cuba to China to southern Sudan.

And we, in our country, must not ignore the words the Pope addresses to us. On his four pilgrimages to America, he has spoken with wisdom and feeling about our strengths and our flaws, our successes and our needs.

The Pope reminds us that while freedom defines our Nation, responsibility must define our lives. He challenges us to live up to our aspirations, to be a fair and just society where all are welcomed, all are valued, and all are protected. And he is never more eloquent than when he speaks for a culture of life.

The culture of life is a welcoming culture, never excluding, never dividing, never despairing, and always affirming the goodness of life in all its seasons. In the culture of life we must make room for the stranger. We must comfort the sick. We must care for the aged. We must welcome the immigrant. We must teach our children to be gentle with one another. We must defend

in love the innocent child waiting to be born.

The center we dedicate today celebrates the Pope's message, its comfort, and its challenge. This place stands for the dignity of the human person, the value of every life, and the splendor of truth. And above all, it stands, in the Pope's words, for the "joy of faith in a troubled world."

I'm grateful that Pope John Paul II chose Washington as the site of this center. It brings honor, and it fills a need. We are thankful for the message. We are also thankful for the messenger, for his personal warmth and prophetic strength, for his good humor and his bracing honesty, for his spiritual and intellectual gifts, for his moral courage, tested against tyranny and against our own complacency.

Always, the Pope points us to the things that last and the love that saves. We thank God for this rare man, a servant of God and a hero of history. And I thank all of you for building this center of conscience and reflection in our Nation's Capital.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:39 p.m. at the center on the campus of the Catholic University of America. In his remarks, he referred to Bernard J. Harrington, bishop of Winona, MN, who introduced the President; Adam Cardinal Maida, archbishop of Detroit, MI; Edmund Cardinal Szoka, president, Pontifical Commission for Vatican City State; and Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, archbishop of Washington, DC.

Remarks Prior to Discussions With Vice Premier Qian Qichen of China and an Exchange With Reporters

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President Bush. It's my honor to welcome our distinguished guest from China. China is a great country. China has got vast potential, and we've got common inter-

ests in China. And I look forward to discussing our interests.

Our relationship, of course, will be a complex relationship. There will be areas