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Saturday, March 28th, 2009

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Pope's heavenly gate

31st October 2005

An 11-column gate will be the new symbol commemorating Pope John Paul II on Plac Piłsudskiego in Warsaw.



Plac Piłsudskiego is getting a new monument

This gateway is part of the architectural project that won first prize in a competition organized by the office of the chief architect of Warsaw.

"This is a victory monument. I hope that the construction will become an all-Poland issue. Zł.4 million is needed to build the gate. It is enough for each Pole to give some 10 groszy," said the co-author of the winning concept, Andrzej Kaliszewski.

The project, prepared by the team of Andrzej and Barbara Kaliszewscy, of Bohdan Napieralski - Architekci, is a sandstone and concrete gate with 11 columns, standing in uneven intervals. This order reflects the rhythm of the Pope's words: "Let your Spirit descend, and renew the face of the earth, the face of this land." The first column symbolizes Karol Wojtyła becoming Pope. It is embellished with the Papal crest, the date October 16, 1978, and the inscription: "Habeus Papam. The second column will have a Carrara marble plate with the last section of the Pope's homily from June 2, 1979 preached on the then Plac Zwycięstwa (Victory Square). Nine columns are dedicated to Pope John Paul II's pilgrimages to Poland, with the names of all the places the Pope visited. The last column will commemorate the Pope's beatification.

The columns will be 18 meters high and the gate will be raised just opposite the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (Grób Nieznanego Żołnierza), where a solemn mass was held, celebrating the Pope's death. "We received 38 projects. It was the best that won," said Warsaw's chief architect, Michał Borowski.

The jury also gave a second award to Włodzimierz Sidorczyk, Szymon Tarnowski, and Marcin Tryc from Grupa Projektowa SiT. Their idea was to construct a contemplation hall under the surface of Plac Piłsudskiego. The room's roofing was to lean on columns made of concrete, but also, as the authors explained, on symbolic light columns. The competition commission evaluated the work as posing large developing difficulties.

The most important factor that was considered by the jury was how the commemorative value of the project goes with the spatial development of the square. The concept also had to be relatively inexpensive and easy to develop.

At the same time, the City's Real Estate Management Department decided to locate the Institute of Pope John Paul II's Philosophy in the attic of a neglected tenement on ul. Foksal 11, and not in the renovated Saski Palace on Plac Piłsudskiego, as was originally planned. Borowski says this is only a temporary location: "The ultimate address is still Saski Palace." The old tenement is home to the Opalka fund, which promotes the modern art of young artists, Stowarzyszenie Twórców Grafiki Użytkowej (Association of Utilizable Graphics), and Fundacja Promocji Muzyki (Music Promotion Fund).

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