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## WYSZYŃSKI, WOJTYŁA AND THE WOMAN (A True Love Story)

MARIAN ZAŁĘCKI, DOYLESTOWN, PA

*"My dear friends, let us love each other, since love is from God and everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. Whoever fails to love does not know God, because God is love."  
(1 Jn. 4:7-8)*

With these words of the beloved Apostle to whom the dying Jesus entrusted his Mother, I would like to begin to tell a story, a true story, a love story. There is not enough space allowed to this work to tell the whole story, but it is my desire to at least reveal enough of the relationship which existed and continues to exist between the late Cardinal Primate of Poland, Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński; Karol Wojtyła—Pope John Paul II; and the Woman whom they both knew and loved dearly as Our Lady of Częstochowa.

### 1. *Częstochowa, the Throne of the Queen*

First, however, I must give a little background. The Shrine of Jasna Góra holds within it the Holy Image of the Black Madonna, a most precious treasure, a sacred "Palladium" of the Polish Nation. Symbolically, Jasna Góra has at all times been a bright, shining light, guiding the Polish nation through the changing phases of her history. The Polish people of every generation have hastened in vast numbers to do honor to the Mother of God as both their Mother and their Queen. This is in a way unique among all the Christian nations. For Poland, from the very beginning of her Baptism as a Catholic State in 966 until the present, has been constant in her love, respect and devotion to the Mother of God as represented in her image. There are few Christian nations that can boast of the same constancy of love, respect and devotion to the Mother of Christ, and that have also been faithful in their love, respect and devotion to Christ and to his Vicar on earth. Theirs is a devotion, love and respect

which is firmly rooted in and based on the constant teaching of the Church. The Polish people have made Mary, Mother of God, Queen of their country—Queen in every respect of the word. While other Christian nations have been called back to their roots by apparitions, especially those in the last two centuries, the Polish people have always looked to their Queen to lead them through good times and bad as only a Queen can lead. This constancy of love, faith and devotion, however, is not a prerogative of the Polish people, but a prerogative of God given to the Polish people for His purposes; and, therefore, the history of the Polish nation and the Shrine of the Black Madonna wear the marks of glory and defeat. The Polish people continually turn their eyes toward the Shrine from whence they expect miracles of salvation and liberty for their country. Thus, the Black Madonna of Częstochowa is a constant reminder of her motherly presence in the Church and, in her wounded face, a constant reminder of the price of that intercession. She has always been the Polish *Hodegetria*, the *Bogarodzica*, the One who shows and leads the way.

Our Holy Father John Paul II, on his first "pilgrimage of faith" to his homeland in 1979, elaborated on the real role of the Shrine of Jasna Góra in the history of Poland:

Jasna Góra is, in fact, not only a place of pilgrimage for the Poles of the motherland and of the whole world but also *the nation's shrine*. One must listen in this holy place, in order to hear the beating of the heart of the nation in the heart of the Mother. For her heart beats, we know, together with all the appointments of history, with all the happenings of our national life: how many times, in fact, has it vibrated with the laments of the historical suffering of Poland, but also with the shouts of joy and victory!<sup>1</sup>

The Pope's visit to Poland was the culmination of years of pain and suffering for the Polish nation but years that were formed and planned by the Queen of Poland, and the one person who most furthered the plans of this Queen was the late Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński, the Primate of Poland's Millennium.

## 2. Wyszyński—a Man of Trust

Stefan Wyszyński was born into a family which had a great devotion to the Mother of God, the Dark Virgin of Częstochowa, but the early death of his mother, while it was accepted, was a great loss to him: "I went to Jasna Góra to say my First Mass so that I could have a Mother, a Mother who would stand beside me at every Mass as she stood beside Christ on Calvary."<sup>2</sup> It was in Mary that he found this Mother. And

<sup>1</sup> "Presence of the Mother of God in Life of the Church and Country," Homily at Marian Shrine of Jasna Góra, June 4, 1979, in *Pilgrim to Poland: John Paul II*, comp. by Daughters of St. Paul (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1979), p. 103-104.

<sup>2</sup> Andrzej Micewski, *Kardynał Wyszyński, Prymas i Mąż Stanu* (Paris: Éditions du Dialogue, 1982), p. 23-24.

thus, there deepened the relationship of a son and a Mother which would carry him through every sort of trial. But this son-Mother relationship was not the only relationship between them, for on May 12, 1946, after an eight-day retreat at Jasna Góra, Fr. Stefan Wyszyński became Bishop Stefan Wyszyński and with this episcopal consecration came the words, "Take this ring, the sign of faith, so that adorned with intrepid faith, you may watch over the Holy Church, God's Bride without blemish." So thus began a new relationship, a relationship which can only be likened to that of St. Joseph and Mary, and which would be reflected in Bishop Wyszyński's fatherly concern for the Polish Church during a period of time in which she would be persecuted in the name of Christ. For the episcopacy is the fullness of the priesthood and the bishop's ring is a symbol of nuptials within the Church, and with this also comes the responsibility of children, the Polish Church. Bishop Wyszyński shared his concerns for the Polish Church and the universal Church with Mary as any father would share his concerns for his children with the mother of those children. His constant vigilance for the good of the Church would bear much fruit, the chief of which would be the elevation of Karol Cardinal Wojtyła to the office of Supreme Pontiff twenty-three years later.

But much was to happen in Poland and the world during those twenty-three years. While the Second World War had come to an end and Europe was in the process of rebuilding, Poland, abandoned by its allies, was left in the clutches of an atheistic Russia which was bent on not only the domination of Poland but also the whole of Europe. And thus began the systematic persecution of the Polish people, but especially the Polish Church, which would culminate in the arrest of the Primate, Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński, on September 25, 1953. After two-and-a-half months of imprisonment, on December 8, 1953, Cardinal Wyszyński made an act of perfect consecration to the Mother of God, in the spirit of St. Louis Grignion de Montfort. His wish was to give himself in submission to Christ through the hands of the "Best Mother." As he recalled the moment: "The house was illuminated all night, and some of the lights burned during the day. The courtyard and the road likewise. Army sentries stood guard around the fence. In the corridors of the ground floor and upstairs the 'gentlemen,' officers of the secret police, kept watch. The isolation from the world was total. Only the road to the Mother of God was open."<sup>3</sup> It was during this time of imprisonment that he slowly formulated the idea that Poland should dedicate itself in submission to Mary, a national community, for the freedom of its

<sup>3</sup> Micewski, *Kardynał Wyszyński*, p. 141.

own church and of the Church throughout the world, and thus began the work of the Great Novena which would end with the Millennium of Poland's Baptism in 1966.

### 3. *Slavery of Love*

At the solemn closing of Poland's millennium celebration on May 3, 1966, the culmination of a nine-year novena, the Polish bishops led by the Primate of Poland, Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński, and Karol Cardinal Wojtyła, surrounded by representatives of all the nation, consecrated themselves "collectively" in filial slavery to Mary, the Mother of the Church. The very purpose of this consecration was to ensure freedom for the Church in the world, especially the Church in Poland. On June 4, 1979, at the close of the homily at Jasna Góra, the Holy Father John Paul II renewed and approved this Act of Consecration to our Lady of Częstochowa as an example for the universal Church:

"Great Mother of God made man, Most Holy Virgin, Our Lady of Jasna Góra . . ."

With these words the Polish Bishops addressed you so many times at Jasna Góra, bearing in their hearts the experiences and the sufferings, the joy and the sorrow, and, above all, the faith, hope and charity of their fellow-countrymen.

May I be permitted today to begin with the same words the new act of consecration to Our Lady of Jasna Góra. This new act springs from that same faith, hope and charity, and from the tradition of our people shared by me for so many years. It springs at the same time from the new duties that, thanks to you, Mary, have been entrusted to me, an unworthy man and also your adoptive son.

How meaningful for me always have been the words that your Son, born from you, Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of man, spoke from the height of the cross, pointing out John the Evangelist: "Woman, behold your son!" (Jn. 19:26) In these words I always found the place for every human being and the place for myself.

By the inscrutable designs of divine Providence I am today present here at Jasna Góra, in my earthly homeland, Poland, and I wish first of all to confirm the acts of consecration and of trust that at various times—"in many and various ways" were pronounced by the Cardinal Primate and the Polish Episcopate. In a very special way, I wish to confirm and renew the act of consecration pronounced at Jasna Góra on May 3, 1966, on the occasion of the millennium of Poland. With this act, the Polish bishops wished, by giving themselves to you, Mother of God, "in your maternal slavery of love," to serve the great cause of *the freedom of the Church* not only in their own homeland but in the whole world. Some years later, on June 7, 1976, they consecrated to you *all of humanity*, all the nations and peoples of the modern world, and their brothers and sisters who are close to them by faith, by language and by the destinies they share in history, extending this consecration to the furthest limits of love as is demanded by your heart, the heart of a Mother who embraces each and every person, always and everywhere.

Today, I come to Jasna Góra as its first pilgrim Pope, and I wish to renew the entire heritage of trust, of consecration, and of hope, that has been accumulated here with such magnanimity by my Brothers in the Episcopate and my fellow countrymen.

*Therefore, I entrust to you, Mother of the Church, all the problems of this Church, the whole of her mission and of her service, while the second millennium of the history of Christianity on earth is about to draw to a close.*<sup>4</sup>

The Pope had rendered a deep theological exposition of the term "slavery," or "servitude," to Mary in the homily which preceded this renewed Act of Consecration on June 4, 1979, at the Shrine of Jasna Góra.

... on May 3, 1966, in this place the Primate of Poland pronounced the act of total servitude to the Mother of God for the freedom of the Church in Poland and throughout the world. This historic act was pronounced here, before Paul VI, absent in body but present in spirit, as a testimony of that lively and strong faith expected and demanded by the present time.

The act speaks of "servitude." It contains a paradox similar to the words of the Gospel according to which one must lose one's life to find it (cf. Mt. 10:39). For love constitutes the fulfillment of freedom, yet at the same time "belonging," and so not being free is part of its essence. However, this "not being free" in love is not felt as slavery but rather as an affirmation and fulfillment of freedom. The act of consecration in slavery indicates therefore a unique dependence and a limitless trust. In this sense slavery (non-freedom) expresses the fullness of freedom, in the same way as the Gospel speaks of the need to lose one's life in order to find it in its fullness.

The words of that act, which were spoken with the language of the historical experiences of Poland, the language of her sufferings and also of her victories, receive a response in this very moment of the life of the Church and of the world, after the close of the Second Vatican Council, which, as we rightly think, has opened a new era. The Council began an age of deeper knowledge of man, of his "joy and hope, grief and anguish," as is stated in the first words of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*. Aware of her great dignity and her magnificent vocation in Christ, the Church wishes to go to meet men. The Church wishes to respond to the eternal yet ever topical queries of human hearts and human history. For that reason she carried out during the Council a work of deeper knowledge of herself, her nature, her mission, her tasks.

On May 3, 1966, the Polish Episcopate added to this fundamental work by the Council its own act of Jasna Góra: the consecration to the Mother of God for the freedom of the Church in the world and in Poland. It was a cry coming forth from the heart and the will: a cry of the whole of the Christian being, from the person and the community, for the full right to proclaim the saving message; a cry that willed to have universal effectiveness by striking root in the present age and in the future. Everything *through* Mary. This is the authentic interpretation of the presence of the Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and of the Church, as is proclaimed by Chapter VIII of the Constitution *Lumen gentium*. This interpretation corresponds to

<sup>4</sup> "Act of Consecration to the Mother of God," Jasna Góra, June 4, 1979, in *Pilgrim to Poland*, p. 110-112.

the tradition of the saints, such as Bernard of Clairvaux, Grignon de Montfort and Maximilian Kolbe.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4. "Totus Tuus"

The election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła to the Papacy on October 16, 1978, filled the Church with tremendous joy and brought a new hope for all humankind. A new Pentecost had dawned. The Church opened to a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit and a deeper understanding of the maternal presence of Mary, the Mother of the Church. Pope John Paul II had become a man of destiny, a chosen leader prepared by Mary for this particular period of time. Educated in the school of Mary, Pope John Paul became "Her Gift to the Church."

His simple Coat of Arms bears a symbol of the Mystery of Redemption: the Sign of the Cross, and the letter "M" for Mary. This meaningful emblem summarizes the true mission of his pontificate: man's salvation achieved through the mystery of the Cross and the maternal role of Mary. It echoes the testimony of the dying Christ: "Son, behold your Mother" (Jn. 19:26). Through this personal consecration to Mary, the Pope fulfilled the wish of the dying Christ. The words "*Totus Tuus*" ("Totally Yours") give witness to that consecration. From his very first public appearance, Pope John Paul II proclaimed to the whole world his love, trust and filial devotion to the Mother of Christ, whom he calls with loving tenderness the "Mother of the Church." To the Cardinals assembled in the Sistine Chapel the day after his election, he addressed these words:

In this grave hour which gives rise to trepidation, we cannot do other than turn our mind with filial devotion to the Virgin Mary, who always lives and acts as a Mother in the mystery of Christ, and repeat the words "*Totus Tuus*," (all thine) which we inscribed in our heart and on our coat of arms twenty years ago on the day of our episcopal ordination.<sup>6</sup>

Pope John Paul II, the best of the "Sons of Poland," inherited a rich tradition of devotion, love and trust for the Mother and Queen of the Polish people who lovingly honor her at the Shrine of Jasna Góra, a most sacred place of their nation. Here, at this Marian Shrine that John Paul II has visited as a pilgrim many times, he felt the call to the priesthood for the first time; it was here that he prayed and found inspiration, wisdom and strength to lead the flock of Christ entrusted to his pastoral care. Without any doubt, Mary herself prepared him for this highest office of the Vicar of

<sup>5</sup> "Presence of the Mother . . .," Homily at Jasna Góra, June 4, 1979, in *Pilgrim to Poland*, p. 106-107.

<sup>6</sup> "Pledges Fidelity to Vatican Council II," Address to College of Cardinals, Sistine Chapel, October 17, 1978, in *Talks of John Paul II*, comp. by Daughters of St. Paul (2 vols.; Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1979), 1: 63.

Christ in the twentieth century, the era of Mary. This deep faith and trust in the special intercession of Our Lady of Częstochowa led him to the Papacy and encouraged him to accept this tremendous responsibility for the universal Church. He publicly acknowledged this in his address to the Primate of Poland, Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński and the Polish pilgrims who came to Rome for the ceremony of his papal inauguration on October 23, 1978. Indicating his ties and unity with the Poles as a "Son of Poland," he strongly underscored a deeper bond of that unity: the common devotion to our Lady of Jasna Góra. Emphasizing that fact, he said:

Venerable and Beloved Cardinal Primate . . . This Polish Pope, who today, full of fear of God, but also of trust, is beginning a new pontificate, would not be on Peter's chair were it not for your faith which did not retreat before prisons and suffering. Were it not for your heroic hope, your unlimited trust in the Mother of the Church! Were it not for Jasna Góra and the whole period of the history of the Church in our country, together with your ministry as bishop and Primate! . . .  
... Do not forget me in prayer at Jasna Góra and in the whole country, in order that this Pope, who is blood of your blood and heart of your hearts, may serve the Church and the world in the difficult times which precede the end of this second millennium.<sup>7</sup>

On his first visit to Poland after his election to the Papacy, he revealed the depth of his "Polish soul" and his personal attachment to Our Lady of Częstochowa. From the hills of the Shrine, the Pope addressed his countrymen with these words:

The call of a son of the Polish nation to the Chair of Peter involves an evident strong connection with this holy place, with this shrine of great hope: so many times I had whispered *Totus tuus* in prayer before this image.

And today I am again with all of you, dear brothers and sisters; with you, beloved fellow-countrymen; with you, the Cardinal Primate of Poland; with all the Episcopate to which I belonged for more than twenty years as Bishop, Metropolitan Archbishop of Krakow and as Cardinal. So many times we came here to this holy place with attentive pastoral ear, to listen to the beating of the heart of the Church and of that of the motherland in the heart of the Mother.<sup>8</sup>

##### 5. *The Pope, a Gift of Mary to the Universal Church*

On December 23, 1978, at a Christmas Eve *Wigilia* supper for priests, Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński gave his thoughts on the election of Pope John Paul II:

It is hard to speak about the great mystery through which this came to pass. On December 8, it was twenty-five years since, at Stoczek in Warmia, I understood the

<sup>7</sup> "Remain Faithful: to Christ, His Cross, the Church," Message to Polish Pilgrims, Rome, October 23, 1978, in *Talks of John Paul II*, 1: 111-112.

<sup>8</sup> "Presence of the Mother . . .," Homily at Jasna Góra, June 4, 1979, in *Pilgrim to Poland*, p. 103.



meaning of Our Lady within the Polish Church as a unifying force, a force that could mobilize and move Poles in each great and proper matter. That is when I gave myself up in servitude to the Most Blessed Mother. When, later, I began to speak of devoting Poland into her servitude, outspoken but pusillanimous brothers said: "The Primate is making a blunder here." Now it has turned out differently... From the beginning of the so-called defeat, it has been necessary to stake everything on Mary.

I had some difficult moments at the conclave. Losing such an excellent co-worker as Cardinal Wojtyła costs me a great deal. You would have to know the mystery of our cooperation and interaction for yourself to understand that. But just when I was full of pain and tears, the new pope began to speak about the Most Blessed Mother—from his position. Then they wrote in the press that he will be a Marian pope because he has already spoken about her twice. But you add up the number of times he has spoken of her since then! Truly, he believes that victory in the universal Church, when it comes, will be her victory.<sup>9</sup>

Thus spoke this latter-day Joseph, a true Patriarch of the Church, who recognized his unique spousal relationship with the Mother of the Church, in his concern for not only the Church in Poland but also the universal Church. It was this fatherly relationship with his children, "the Church of Poland," and his spousal relationship with Mary, the Mother of the Church, which allowed him to lead the Church in Poland, in the person of John Paul II, to the very summit of the Church. But the story does not end here, for in the last twelve years we have seen the example given by Cardinal Wyszyński in his relationship with Mary, the Mother of the Church and the Polish Church, take on new dimensions in the relationship which John Paul II has with this same Mother and the universal Church. In 1976, at a Lenten Retreat given by then Cardinal Wojtyła to Pope Paul VI and the Papal Household, the first rays of this relationship began to shine within the universal Church, when he spoke thus:

Within the dimensions of the universe the Son of God, the eternal Word, the Lord of the ages to come is her son and she is his mother. Therefore all that goes to make up what he bequeathed—the work of salvation, the Mystical Body of Christ, the People of God, the Church—is taken care of, and always will be taken care of, by her—with the same fidelity and strength that she showed in taking care of her son: from the stable in Bethlehem, to Calvary and to the upper room on the day of Pentecost when the Church was born.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Andrzej Micewski, *Cardinal Wyszyński: A Biography*, trans. from the Polish by William R. Brand and Katarzyna Mroczkowski-Brand (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), p. 405.

<sup>10</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *Sign of Contradiction* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), p. 205-206.