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## **The Bond Between John Paul II and Jasna Góra**

### **Introduction**

**H**ow could I fail to mention Jasna Góra, (the sanctuary of) my homeland in this world," wrote Pope John Paul II to all the sons and daughters of the Church in his encyclical letter *Redemptoris Mater*.<sup>1</sup> A question of this kind, containing in itself a self-evident answer, cannot be ignored by any reader of this important document. Why? In order to avoid a superficial, or perhaps a subjective—and therefore unconvincing—answer, we must take into account the general context of the papal doctrine of "Jasna Góra," and his Marian spirituality.

To understand the Pope's "Marian path," it is necessary to trace its progress from the origin, through the baptism of Poland, the Second Vatican Council, down to the post-Council years. Only this broad perspective, encompassing more than a millennium, will render John Paul II's motives, and his Polish-Slavonic Marian piety, comprehensible.

It is within this context that we wish to present both the origins and the development of the Pope's teaching concerning Jasna Góra, as well as the mystery of his total sacrifice to the Holiest Mother, expressed through his charismatic rapport with Jasna Góra's "mysterium."

### **The Origins and the Development of Papal Teaching**

If we analyse all the "Marian prayers" of Cardinal Wojtyła, we will see that John Paul II, "the man of trust,"<sup>2</sup> brought to the Holy City the style of his Marian piety and Marian thought, whose source, ground and manifestation go back to the years of his service as Cardinal, and, primarily, to his experience of the mystery of Jasna Góra.

In a way, that which used to "belong" to the Polish Church, has become the property of the Universal Church when Cardinal Wojtyła was elected Pope. Thus, Polish Marian heritage, of clearly Slavonic provenance, has become part of the universalist heritage of the Church.

Could one say that the papal piety is rooted in a peculiarly Polish-Slavonic religiosity? Most certainly so. Karol Wojtyła bears within him the entire spiritual her-

itage of his nation, its historical experience, and its characteristic Slavonic culture. He is fully aware of this heritage, which he absorbed from his native country.<sup>3</sup> The roots of his soul reach deep down into his motherland.<sup>4</sup> When describing the Marian spirituality of the present Father of Christianity, expressed in his boundless trust, in his numerous pilgrimages to the sanctuaries of St. Mary around the world, and in his untiring search for her presence, one must not gloss over the profound spiritual heritage built by many generations of Christians that shapes the character of the Pope.<sup>5</sup> One must not gloss over this Church and this nation, whose history and fate are bound inseparably to the Shrine of St. Mary on Jasna Góra. One cannot avoid speaking of the phenomenon of Polish religiosity, of its identity, traditions, and values, which reveal the motherly protection of the Virgin.

If one looks carefully into Wojtyła's biography, one cannot but notice its "Marian" tone. The path of his life was and is irrevocably Marian: since the first years of his life, he has been a devotee of the Virgin, and the Virgin has always been a mother to him. Baptism, a tiny altar of St. Mary, First Communion, the death of his mother and brother, then his father, the education he received from his teachers and professors, the picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in the Wadowice church, the Carmelite scapular, the Marian pilgrimages, the German occupation, hard labour in a factory, the *Treatise on the Perfect Prayer to the Holy Virgin* by St. Louis Grignon de Montfort (the main source of his Marian piety), the Living Rosary, the underground seminary, the spiritual teachers, and other events of his inner life unknown to us—they all form a rich backdrop, against which his Marian piety shaped itself.

## **The Marian Character of His Life and Ministration**

### **The Priest**

Ordination and ministration must have had a significant impact on the spiritual character of the priest Wojtyła, and, in particular, on his attitude towards the Mother of the Highest Priest. Gradually, in a more and more profound way, he discovered the closeness of St. Mary, and his intimate relationship with her. The young priest "entered" the *mysterium Mariae*, heard a summons to reflect on, and be responsible for this Marian dimension of his life. When he was given the right to celebrate Holy Mass, he also became aware of his right to consider St. Mary as the mother of his priesthood. We are speaking here not merely of Marian piety as expressed through religious ceremonies, but of a profound "admitting" of St. Mary into the priest's very self, into his entire ministration. The spiritual attitude of Karol Wojtyła gives rise to a summons to admit with full responsibility the grand and profound closeness of the Mother of Christ and the Mother of Priests to his life, and to his priesthood.

### **Bishop and Cardinal**

When Karol Wojtyła became Bishop, he adopted the credo “*Totus Tuus*”:<sup>6</sup> belonging entirely to Christ through Mary, the Mother of Church (*Totus Christi -- Totus Mariae -- Totus Ecclesiae*).

From the very outset of his work as bishop and priest, Karol Wojtyła strove for the highest possible fidelity to his Marian vows. One should remark that before he became Pope, Bishop Wojtyła regularly visited Jasna Góra.<sup>7</sup>

The reader of Wojtyła’s “Marian” speeches will notice the maturing of the influence of the Mother of Christ upon his spiritual life and ministration. This was certainly the result of his ever-deepening “entrance” into the *mysterium Mariae*, which for him was the shortest and easiest path leading to the *mysterium Christi* and to salvation.<sup>8</sup> This understanding of the role and function of the Virgin in the *mysterium Ecclesiae* and in the life of Christians gave rise in him, in response to the apostle’s summons, a full “acceptance” of St. Mary.<sup>9</sup> The “lesson” of her maternal service itself is adopted by Karol Wojtyła as the basis of his meditation, and his fervent co-operation with her.

The years of his work as Bishop and Cardinal (1958-1978) are a period of intense ministration, spreading the Word of God and the celebration of the Holy Mass during the main holidays on Jasna Góra (May 3 and August 26). Wojtyła was not a lone pilgrim however: he invited his Cracovian flock, and all the believers of his archdiocese to join him there.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, all the important pastoral ministrations of the Polish Church promoted by Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, such as The Vows of the Nation, The Great Novena on the threshold of the 1,000th Anniversary of Baptism of Poland, the Act of Submission to Mary (for the freedom of the Church in Poland and around the world), and peregrinations of the copy of the miraculous painting of Our Lady of Częstochowa to all the parishes in the country, engaged the active co-operation of Wojtyła.

The collection of homilies and conferences is likewise an important document testifying to his generous Jasna Góra ministration.<sup>11</sup> One might say, therefore, that the “Polish” period of foretelling the mystery of St. Mary present in the mystery of Christ and Church, in the history of the nation and in the life of every man, is the key to a proper understanding of his well-known credo *Totus Tuus*. This “*Marian work*” of Karol Wojtyła’s Jasna Góra teaching still requires professional theological systematisation.<sup>12</sup>

Cardinal Wojtyła’s bond with Jasna Góra was manifested not only in his charismatic feeling of piety towards the Mother of God, but also in his interest in Marian theology.<sup>13</sup> The Mariological inspiration of his thought is based primarily on the “*Mariological testimony*” of the *New Testament*, and on the doctrine of the last Church Council. Wojtyła’s Mariology exhibits close links to Christology, ecclesiology and anthropology. It is rooted in, and takes its nourishment from, the living experience of faith. The “*Marian*” testimony and Mariological thought are not isolated

from it, but co-exist with it in perfect harmony. In this light it is possible to understand his multifarious interest in the many forms of the contemporary Cult of St. Mary, which he subjects to theological interpretation.<sup>14</sup> One should say, therefore, that he correctly “read” the person of the Holiest Virgin, inseparable from Her Son, the Son of God the Father, not only due to the maternal bond, but also to the mission of salvation. For Wojtyła, this fundamental reality of salvation is irrevocably open to the pilgrims united in the Holy Church.

### **The Pope**

“*There would not have been this Polish Pope upon St. Peter’s Capital without Jasna Góra.*”<sup>15</sup> This confession, made at the threshold of his papal ministration, continues to attract the attention not only of the members of the Polish Church.

The special bond between John Paul II and the “*Domus Mariae*” on Jasna Góra is of more than just personal significance; it is important to all believers. It makes it possible not only to penetrate the richness of this reality, but also to reach the fundamental dimension, to wit, the living presence of St. Mary in the church’s mission of salvation.

The assertion, found in the *Marian Encyclical Letter*, namely, that the presence of St. Mary is manifested in, amongst other things, the faith and piety of individual believers,<sup>16</sup> must be applied first and foremost to the author of these words himself. He is the most authoritative member of the Church community, in whom the dynamic presence of St. Mary is reflected. Consequently, his strong ties to the Shrine of Jasna Góra, the richness of his Marian spirituality, the countless speeches, the pilgrimages, the style of the “Jasna Góra” ministration, the acts of trust, the prayers, and, lastly, his very person are a reflexion—in a certain dimension—of the maternal presence of St. Mary “in” and “through” it *Locum sacrum claromontanum*, and the entire Catholic Church. This “holy bond” of the first priest of the church community was confirmed during his first papal pilgrimage to his motherland. He said from the summit of Jasna Góra: “*There is an obvious bond between the election of a Polish Pope, and this holy place. With this sanctuary of great hope—I can only say again: Totus Tuus....*”<sup>17</sup> The word “bond” used by the Holy Father reveals his total absorption in the Sanctuary, and a heroic trust in the unfailing protection of the Holy Virgin.

The physical distance to Jasna Góra does not diminish his attachment to it; on the contrary: “... *the two hills: Jasna Góra and the Vatican, are not only close to each other; they have become identical, they live in each other. Such is the law of communion, the law of spiritual fusion.*”<sup>18</sup> Thus, in its spiritual dimension, the Vatican, in the “today” of Karol Wojtyła’s papal ministration, should be perceived and interpreted also through the dimension of Jasna Góra.

The Pope’s numerous speeches, homilies, letters, addresses, prayers (the “*Jasna Góra cycles*”), the four visits to Poland—all these constitute a forceful confirmation of his bond with Jasna Góra. No other sanctuary in the world has been so much enriched with thought and feeling. This fact is an urgent challenge to contemporary

theologians, who should study in greater depth the “*Jasna Góra*” teaching of John Paul II.<sup>19</sup>

One should also mention the Holy Father’s votive offerings to St. Mary: the Golden Rose, the bullet-pierced belt, and the cassock, a token of gratitude for his spared life, and a golden heart with the inscription *Totus Tuus*, the symbol of his devotion. These *ex-voto*, placed close to the Holy Icon of the Mother of God, can justly be regarded as the true teaching of piety towards her, to whom he had surrendered himself as the “*slave of maternal love*.”<sup>20</sup>

The presence of St. Mary in the “*pilgrimage of faith*” of John Paul II is not symbolic, but *concrete—real*. Wojtyła experiences his devotion to St. Mary not only in the form of piety, but as the source of a son’s freedom, spiritual power and apostolic effectiveness, and as the dimension of the deepest spiritual communion with Christ and the mystery of salvation. This is also the source of the proper Marian sense of piety that he inspires in the hearts of the sons and daughters of the Church. We are dealing here with a mature, true and profound dimension of the Cult of the Mother of God! *Redemptoris Mater* and *Mulieris Dignitatem* are—according to his own words—the fruit born of this reality.<sup>21</sup>

Of course, the Pope’s absolute trust in the Holy Mother did not come as a surprise: his Marian piety grew by degrees until it became complete, until it reached the stage of *Totus Tuus*. His spiritual *itinerarium* was, and still is, marked by an extraordinary acceptance of St. Mary to the entire reality of his very existence. The personal Marian “*experience*” of the Holy Father is the foundation of his “*Jasna Góra*” ministration. Without any doubt, this “*Polish*” House of St. Mary had a decisive influence on the Marian character of his religiosity, and set the tone for his productive ministration in today’s Church. Therefore, it is impossible in any way to separate the Sanctuary of Jasna Góra from the spiritual image of the present Father of Christendom. Jasna Góra is the key necessary to understand his total sacrifice to the Holiest Virgin, and his multifarious Marian apostleship. First and foremost, he “*learned*” at the “*school of Jasna Góra*” how to experience fully the *mysterium Christi et Ecclesiae* through the encompassing presence of *mysterium Mariae*. Today, this reality is common knowledge throughout Christendom. The strong personality of the Holy Father is justly seen in the aspect of his Marian path; he is rightly called by many the “*Marian Pope*.”

## Conclusion

The questions that arose at the beginning of Karol Wojtyła’s papal ministration, namely: Why does he speak of his complete trust in the Mother of Christ? Why is his papal crest so Marian? Why does he refer to himself so often as the servant of St. Mary, wholly belonging to her—*Totus Tuus*? Why does he speak so frequently about—and to—St. Mary? Why so many homilies, acts of devotion, pilgrimages to the Marian sanctuaries around the world? Today, after more than a decade of fruitful work, when we understand the Pope’s spirituality better, these questions are an anachronism. He generously “*shared*” the secret and the profound meaning of his Marian

piety with the members of the Church of Christ. He pointed out its sources, and explained why he emphasised so often the place and role of St. Mary in his and in the life of the faithful. Thanks to him, many have understood the proper place of St. Mary in the religious life of Christians, many have overcome a certain “Marian fear,” which has unfortunately made itself felt in the life of the Church, particularly in the West. Many have understood that Karol Wojtyła is a kind of point of reference in relation to Marian spirituality for the entire congregation.

Nevertheless, his peculiar “acceptance” of St. Mary and her wonderful closeness in his life and ministration, still need to be interpreted; in some circles, the Marian “crisis” still needs to be overcome. He is certainly trying to help others to find St. Mary the Mother, given to the people by Christ the Saviour, and he would like to help us understand the presence and the mission of St. Mary in *mysterium salutis*. The person and the ministration of John Paul II is a “*signum*” for the church, about to cross the threshold of the second millennium since the birth of the Saviour of the world.

In this universal dimension of the Church, the words of John Paul II’s act of surrendering the world at Jasna Góra are alive in the Immaculate Heart of the Mother of all people:

*Our Lady of Jasna Góra, Mother of Church!  
Once again I surrender myself into the “maternal slavery of love” according  
to the words of my credo: Totus Tuus!  
I surrender the entire church to you—everywhere, to the remotest corners  
of the world!  
I surrender mankind to you, surrender all people—my brothers.  
All Peoples and Nations.  
I surrender Europe and all the continents.  
I surrender Rome and Poland, united by your Servant with a new bond of  
love.  
Mother, accept me!  
Mother, do not turn me away!  
Mother, lead me!<sup>22</sup>*

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, in: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, X, 1, 1987, p. 777.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the Homily delivered on Jasna Góra, June 4, 1979, in: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 71, 1979, p. 764.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the Audience on February 2, 1983, in: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VI, 1, 1983, p. 339.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the Audience on April 4, 1984, “L’Osservatore Romano” 6, 1984, p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the Homily delivered on Jasna Góra, June 4, 1979, in: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 71, 1979, p. 758.

<sup>6</sup> He took the credo from St. Louis Grignon de Montfort (“*Tuus totus ego sum, et omnia mea tua sunt,*” “*Totus Tuus, Maria, Mater gratiae; praebere mihi cor tuum, Maria*”). Cf. R. Laurentin, *Tutte le genti mi diranno beata*, Bologna 1986, p. 189.

<sup>7</sup> Before he became Pope, Karol Wojtyła visited Jasna Góra 102 times, and spent 137 days there. Cf. E. Wilk, “*Totus Tuus*” *Jasnogórskimi pielgrzymkami pisane*,” “*Jasna Góra*” 9: 1991, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Ingress to the Wawel Cathedral, March 8, 1964, in: *Sermons 1962-1978*, Kraków 1979, p. 17-18.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Homily on Jasna Góra, May 3, 1966*, in: “*Te Deum*” *Narodu Polskiego. Obchody Tysiąclecia Chrztu Polski w świetle dokumentów kościelnych /RAINA;P./*, Olsztyn 1991, p. 143.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. for example, the *Letter for the May 3 celebration from April 8, 1968*, in: *Nauczyciel i Pasterz. Listy pasterskie-Komunikaty-Zarządzenia 1959-1978*, ed. by M. Jagosz, Rome 1987, pp. 242-243.

<sup>11</sup> We are in the possession of approximately 70 homilies devoted to the Mother of Jasna Góra (the largest share of his “Marian” speeches). The explanation of this fact is twofold: on the one hand, it is justified by the peculiar focus of Polish ministration work after the Second World War on the Shrine of Jasna Góra; on the other hand, it is the result of Karol Wojtyła’s mature “decision.” Cf. K. Wojtyła, *Oto Matka Twoja. Homilie i przemówienia związane z Matką Boską Jasnogórską*, ed. by S. Rożej, G. Lorenz, Jasna Góra-Rome 1979; R. J. Abramek, *Jasnogórska Mariologia Kardynała Karola Wojtyły, papieża Jana Pawła II*, “*Studia Claromontana*” 1: 1981, pp. 7-39.

<sup>12</sup> In order to understand and interpret his Marian thought properly, one needs to study his twenty-year-long ministration in the Kraków archdiocese. These texts are not only a valuable source for the study of his preparation for the role of pope, but also of his Marian spirituality.

<sup>13</sup> We know that Karol Wojtyła was especially active during the Second Vatican Council, and that his work was much appreciated by the Council Fathers. Particularly important was his co-operation in the drafting of *Lumen Gentium*. Among his many contributions, there are three that concern Chapter VIII, devoted to the Mother of God.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. K. Mroczek, *La strada Mariana di Karol Wojtyła, “Miles Immaculatae” I-II*, 1991, p. 68.

<sup>15</sup> Speech to the Polish people, October 23, 1978, in: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, I, 1978, p. 52.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *RM: Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, op. cit.*, p. 776.

<sup>17</sup> Homily on Jasna Góra, June 4, 1979, in: *AAS*, 71, 1979, p. 759.

<sup>18</sup> Address to the pilgrims from Gdańsk and to the Pauline monks at the Vatican, October 21, 1980, “*L’Osservatore Romano*” 10, 1980, p. 23.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. K. Mroczek, *Il Santuario della Madre di Jasna Góra nell’insegnamento di Giovanni Paolo II. Verso una “Teologia del Santuario,” Pontificia Facultas Theologica “Marianum,” Roma 1996*, and other works.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Farewell to Jasna Góra, June 6, 1979, in: *AAS*, 71, 1979, p. 833.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Giovanni Paolo II, *Varcare la soglia della speranza*, Milano 1994, p. 231.

<sup>22</sup> Farewell to Jasna Góra, June 6, 1979, *op. cit.*, p. 833.