

**Jacek Jezierski\***

Elbląg diocese, Poland

## KAROL WOJTYŁA'S SERMON FOR THE CENTENARY OF MARIAN APPARITIONS IN GIETRZWAŁD

**Summary:** This article analyses the sermon which has been delivered by Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, during the Holy Mass, on September, 11 in 1977, in Gietrzwałd, during the ceremony of the 100th anniversary of the Marian apparitions. The cardinal begins his sermon from the letter to Hebrews (1,1-2) which discusses the historic culmination of the God's Revelation in the person of Jesus. He then explains the historic context of the apparitions in Gietrzwałd and accentuates the clue of the Polish speech in the message of Our Lady and develops the theme of human culture, expressed through language and words. He reminds us that Polish culture is based in Christianity and he justifies the right of Poles to manifest religiousness in their culture. The Blessed Virgin, because her message was delivered in Polish, is called Our Lady of Gietrzwałd by the Cardinal.

**Keywords:** Gietrzwałd, Wojtyła, Marian apparitions, the Polish culture, Christian origins of the culture.

The centenary of Marian apparitions, which took place in Gietrzwałd in 1877, was solemnly commemorated by the Warmian diocese. The central event of this jubilee was the Holy Mass celebrated at the spring, outside the basilica. The mass was led by Cardinal Karol Wojtyła – the Cracow metropolitan archbishop [1920–2005]. He delivered a sermon to parishioners and pilgrims who attended the event in great numbers.<sup>1</sup> An important occasion, apart from the centenary of apparitions, was the fact that the reliability of the apparitions and the veneration to Our Lady that developed among the believers after those events was officially confirmed. An appropriate decree was issued by the Bishop of Warmia, Józef Drzazga. His decision was granted a *nil obstat* from the Holy See.<sup>2</sup>

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\* Address: bishop dr Jacek Jezierski, e-mail: j.jezierski@episkopat.pl

<sup>1</sup> *Kalendarium życia Karola Wojtyły*, ed. A. Boniecki, Kraków 1983, p. 776.

<sup>2</sup> Warmian Bishop Józef Drzazga, Decree No. 2100/77, in: *Maryjne orędzie z Gietrzwałdu. Materiały z sympozjum mariologicznego. Gietrzwałd 13–15 września 2002 roku*, ed. J. Jezierski, K. Brzozowski, T. Siudy, Częstochowa–Gietrzwałd 2003, p. 159–160.

Two parts can be clearly distinguished in the sermon delivered by Cardinal Wojtyła. One concerns the historical context of the apparitions, their content and meaning. The second one contains a reflection of culture, the Christian culture of Poland and its place in social life, the Polish nation and state in 1977. The sermon can be described as a thanksgiving speech, addressed to Mary, who is the Mother and the Queen, caring for those people who are harmed by the high and mighty of this world. The sermon referred to in this paper has been little known to date, and even somehow forgotten. It requires recollection and reflection. Such reflection would focus not only on Marian and Mariological studies, but also on the context of the history of the Church in Poland in the second half of the twentieth century. A discussion of the content of the sermon and the outline of the historical context and social situation in Poland in 1977 will be presented below.

### **Reference to Hebrews 1:1-2**

The Cardinal started his teaching with a quotation from the beginning of the letter to the Hebrews [1: 1-2]. The author of this letter says that God was revealed in the history of the chosen people through prophets. The culmination of God's revelation was the birth of Jesus and eternal word of God. The Preacher referred in the introduction to God's revelation in Christ. It was a so-called public revelation, binding on all Christians.

### **Historical context of the apparitions in Gietrzwałd**

The author of the sermon does not examine the theological features of the Marian apparitions in Gietrzwałd. He assumes their validity, confirmed in the negative form by the Church. Here is the relevant fragment of the decree issued by the Warmian bishop: "Confirming private revelations by the Church only means that they are not contrary to the faith and morality, therefore they can be accepted without exposure to spiritual danger."<sup>3</sup>

Cardinal Wojtyła was interested in the historical background of the apparitions. They took place in the period of Poland's partitions. Warmia lost its links to the Polish Republic during the first partition [1772] and was included into the Prussian state. The relations between Warmia and Poland began in 1466, i.e. from the Second Treaty of Toruń.

<sup>3</sup> Biskup warmiński Józef Drzazga, Dekret nr 2100/77, in: *Maryjne orędzie z Gietrzwałdu*, p. 159.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Prussian state, led by Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, started its fight with the Roman Catholic Church in Germany, but also in the area of Warmia [the so-called Kulturkampf]. It was the time when Germanisation programmes, addressed to the population living in Catholic Warmia and to the Evangelical population in Mazury, were established.

Gietrzwałd is situated in the southern part of Warmia. This region was populated with settlers from northern Mazovia. The Mazovian peasants brought the Polish language and tradition, as well as the Catholic faith to Warmia.<sup>4</sup>

The Marian apparitions in 1877 and related intensity of pilgrimage movement<sup>5</sup> worried Prussian administrative authorities. The Preacher reminded the congregation that the dialogue between Mary and the visionaries was held in Polish, which was used by the girls as their everyday language. It should be added that at that time, the inhabitants of Warmia used a dialect [Warmian dialect], i.e. a regional variety of the Polish language that developed through contact with the German language.

### Significance of Marian apparitions

In his sermon, Cardinal Wojtyła said that Mary "...stood up for human rights and the rights of the nation". She did that "on behalf of her Son". She achieved this by starting a conversation in the Polish language – a language whose use was restricted and persecuted by the Prussian authorities. Mary claimed "the rights of the oppressed and the persecuted". The words of Our Lady referred, in the opinion of the Preacher, not only to the situation of the Warmia population, but to the situation of the Polish nation under the partitions.

The words of Mary raised the spirits of Poles, deprived of their own state and restricted in their civil freedoms. They raised hope and encouraged persistent rosary prayers. They stigmatized moral flaws.

Mary, the caring Mother, demanded basic rights for persons and peoples [the right to one's own language, native culture and religious freedom].

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<sup>4</sup> *Objawienia Matki Boskiej w Gietrzwałdzie dla ludu katolickiego podług urzędowych dokumentów spisane*, reprint from the second issue by Brunsberg 1883, Olsztyn 2006, p. 7–8.

<sup>5</sup> As Cardinal Wojtyła mentioned in his sermon: "A few days ago, documents were published by the researcher – historian, preserved in police archives to this day. Those documents prove that simple words uttered by Our Lady to the Warmian children evoked a great anxiety among the partitioner's administration" [Sermon of 11 September 1977]. This probably refers to the research conducted by dr. Tadeusz Grygier. See: T. Grygier, *Uroczystości gietrzwałdzkie ich aspekt katolicki oraz polski w latach 1877–1944 w świetle akt władz wschodniopruskich*, "Studia Warmińskie" vol. 14, 1977, p. 225–323.

## **The word, human culture, the word of God**

The subject of culture was extensively discussed in the second part of the sermon by Cardinal Wojtyła. Human culture emerges and develops in contact with words. It is an expression of experiences and searches undertaken by the man. Culture is expressed in the language and words of man.

Through the apostolic activity of the Church, the word of God, the world of the Gospel, reaches the people and cultures and it is translated into their languages. Human culture in contact with the Gospel is subject to development. This is when it finds “its full dimension”. Human cultures have an opportunity to meet the Gospel and Christ Himself through the word. Jesus Christ is the primary word of God to the world. The full dimension of human culture is: “the dimension of truth, love, justice and freedom”.

### **Struggle for the proper position of the Christian culture in Poland**

Cardinal Wojtyła recalled the thousand-year-long links between Polish culture and Christianity. He emphasized that “...the truth about the Polish culture, its roots, genealogy, and the rights of its development should be brought to our attention on this day”.

Therefore, during the apparitions in Gietrzwałd, starting a dialogue with the girls in Polish, Mary reminded us of the values of the mother tongue and the native culture: “...speaking in the Polish language – to Polish children, Mary stood up for the Christian heritage of the entire Polish culture”.

There exists a relationship between the native language and the culture of the nation. Disappearance of the national language can result in the culture of the nation dying out. It is so, since the word, in this case, the native one, as the Cardinal said, is “...the material for human life and culture, the life of the people’s culture.”<sup>6</sup>

In his sermon, Cardinal Wojtyła started a polemic with the Marxist understanding of culture. He taught that the real culture was not an artificial construct, a superstructure based on economic relations. The culture grows from the depths of a person and expresses a human being. Culture cannot be created through its detachment from the world of experiences of a person, including his or her religious experience. Culture cannot be administratively steered and become a tool for fighting with religion. In addition, the religious thread or the religious insight into reality cannot be eliminated.

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<sup>6</sup> See: M. Radej, *Kaznodziejstwo biskupa, arcybiskupa i kardynała Karola Wojtyły w katedrze na Wawelu*, Kraków 2008, p. 170–174.

Thus, the Cardinal claimed the right of the Polish society and nation in 1977 to create culture without political restrictions. At that time, the socialist Polish state was fighting against the Christian culture. It was eliminating the Christian culture from social life and hindered its promotion. It preferred artists who declared a distance to religion or inclination to atheism. There were attempts to push Christianity to the "margin" of life, in the form of a "tolerated ghetto". The state tried to hold a "cultural monopoly", from which the culture inspired by Christian thought would be absent. Christianity in Poland at that time was thus "condemned to absence" from public and cultural life. "As if the feature of the Polish soul were not Christianity, but secularity and atheism."<sup>7</sup>

The Cardinal also pointed out to the absence of a religious, Christian theme in radio and TV programmes or press. "...we are absent from there, since Christ is absent, since God is removed," he said. The Preacher also spoke up for the radio and television transmission of the Holy Mass for the sick. Three years later, workers striking in the Gdańsk Shipyard spoke up for the same.<sup>8</sup>

In view of eliminating religion from social life and removing religious and Christian themes from the Polish culture, the Cardinal demanded that the right to the presence of religion in the life of the nation and society should be respected. "We cannot agree to be deprived of what we are entitled to".

### **Mary is our mother and queen**

In the Gietrzwałd sermon, Cardinal Wojtyła used many descriptions referring to the person of Mary. He called Her: Mother of God, Mother of the Word Incarnated and the Queen of Heaven and Earth. He described her as: the Mother of all people and nations, our Mother, Mother of people, Mother of our Homeland, Mother of Warmia, Lady of Gietrzwałd.

However, he kept on returning in his sermon to two titles and functional descriptions, namely Queen and Mother. The Queen, since: "This is the Polish land, this is Her Kingdom. And therefore we all put our life into Her hands". Mother, since it is Her who comforts: "Do not be sad". She reprimands. She promises: "I will be always with you". She keeps her promise.

According to Cardinal Wojtyła, Mary, present in the mystery of Christ and the Church, fulfils a double mission for the Polish nation: "She indeed not only rules it [the Polish nation] but, first of all, mothers it".

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<sup>7</sup> See: *ibidem*, p. 175–180.

<sup>8</sup> See: The record of the agreement concluded between the Governmental Commission and the Inter-Enterprise Strike Committee on 31 August 1980 in the Gdańsk Shipyard, Re. 3, No. 2: "The Government shall ensure radio transmission of the Sunday mass under a specific arrangement with the Episcopate".

In the opinion of many listeners present that day, the Gietrzwałd sermon delivered by the Cracow Metropolitan was difficult. Presumably, the motive concerning culture and its relation to God's word could be difficult. However, the sermon was well prepared, also from the rhetorical point of view. For instance, its two basic parts are separated with a sentence "A word has been spoken".

### A historical note concerning the text of the sermon

Karol Wojtyła's sermon of 11 September 1977 was recorded by Canons of the Lateran using a reel-to-reel tape recorder. The tape was stored in the Gietrzwałd canonry – parsonage. It was stored by the parish priest, Rev. Franciszek Matuszewski CRL. He made the tape available so that the sermon could be played and written down. Before the sermon was published in "Kalendarz Maryjny", Rev. Walenty Szymański, the director of the Warmian Diocesan Publishing House obtained consent for publication from Archbishop Marian Jaworski, who held the copyrights. The text was prepared for print by Rev. Jan Roslan and Rev. Jacek Jezierski.<sup>9</sup>

The next edition of the sermon was published in an album about Gietrzwałd, edited by ks. Kazimierz Brzozowski i S. Budzyński.<sup>10</sup>

The sermon was published for the third time in the collective work entitled *Maryjne orędzie z Gietrzwałdu* [2003].<sup>11</sup>

Fragments of the sermon were recorded on a CD, attached to the multi-authored publication entitled *Orędzie gietrzwałdzkie wczoraj i dziś* [2005] edited by Katarzyna Parzych.<sup>12</sup> The two last editions received consent from Archbishop Józef Kowalczyk, the-then Apostolic Nuncio to Poland.

In 2017, there was an album published entitled *Ja zawsze będę przy was. Objawienia Matki Bożej w Gietrzwałdzie*, edited by Maciej Bartnikowski and Bartłomiej Matczak. In this book we can read the sermon preached by Karol Wojtyła.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Ja zawsze będę przy was*, in: *Kalendarz Maryjny na rok 1988*, Olsztyn 1987, p. 81–86. The quotations cited in the paper are derived from the first edition of the text.

<sup>10</sup> *Sanktuarium maryjne w Gietrzwałdzie*, Warszawa 2002. In the album is the text of the Wojtyła's sermon. This is a copy of the version, which is in the *Kalendarz Maryjny na rok 1988*.

<sup>11</sup> "Ja zawsze będę przy was". *Kazanie kardynała Karola Wojtyły wygłoszone w Gietrzwałdzie 11 września 1977 roku*, in: *Maryjne orędzie z Gietrzwałdu. Materiały z sympozjum mariologicznego. Gietrzwałd 13–15 września 2002 roku*, ed. J. Jezierski, K. Brzozowski, T. Siudy, Częstochowa–Gietrzwałd 2003, p. 161–165.

<sup>12</sup> *Orędzie gietrzwałdzkie wczoraj i dziś*, ed. K. Parzych, Olsztyn 2005.

<sup>13</sup> *Ja zawsze będę przy was. Objawienia Matki Bożej w Gietrzwałdzie*, ed. M. Bartnikowski, B. Matczak, Olsztyn 2017, p. 27–29.

There is a TV recording of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła's speech in Gietrzwałd. Shorthand notes made by secret service officers were found in the resources of the Institute of National Remembrance.<sup>14</sup>

The sermon delivered by the Cracow Archbishop in Gietrzwałd on 11 September 1977 was not a homily. It was a classic speech. The author first addressed the Virgin Mary with the gratitude for defending the rights of the Catholic people of Warmia and the Polish nation in partitioned country. Afterwards, he also very firmly claimed the right of the Christian culture to be present in the social life of contemporary Poland. It was therefore a speech delivered by a defender of the rights of the Church in Poland and the Polish society, who were deprived of the space of freedom in the sphere of culture. The Gietrzwałd sermon by Karol Wojtyła, although relatively unknown, is of huge importance. It should be placed next to the Parliamentary Sermons by Piotr Skarga and major sermons of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Primate of Poland.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> IPN, Bi File ref. No. 087/346/1, typescript pp. 1–6 [164–169].

<sup>15</sup> See: K. Panuś, *Historia kaznodziejstwa*, Kraków 2007, p. 448–455.

## **Kazanie kard. Karola Wojtyły w stulecie objawień maryjnych w Gietrzwałdzie**

**Streszczenie:** W artykule omówiono kazanie kardynała Karola Wojtyły, wygłoszone podczas Mszy św. 11 września 1977 r. w Gietrzwałdzie podczas obchodów setnej rocznicy objawień maryjnych. Kardynał rozpoczyna od Listu do Hebrajczyków (1,1-2), w którym jest mowa o historycznej kulminacji Bożego objawienia w osobie Jezusa. Następnie wyjaśnia historyczny kontekst objawień gietrzwałdzkich. Akcentuje wątek polskiej mowy w orędziu maryjnym. Rozwija aspekt kultury ludzkiej, wyrażanej poprzez język i słowo. Przypomina chrześcijańskie podstawy kultury polskiej. Uzasadnia prawo Polaków do uzewnętrzniania religijności poprzez kulturę. Maryja przekazująca orędzie w języku polskim jest nazwana Panią Gietrzwałdzką.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Gietrzwałd, Wojtyła, objawienia maryjne, kultura polska, chrześcijańskie korzenie kultury.