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“REVELATIONS” IN GIETRZWAŁD AND CONTEMPORARY APPARITIONS OF MARY

Summary: The “Revelations” in Gietrzwałd and contemporary apparitions of Mary is a subject worth analysing, especially so since June 2017 was the 140th anniversary of the Apparitions of Mary in Gietrzwałd. Saint John Paul II perceived the revelations as a sign of the times, upon which the Church shall constantly consider, in order to read them and interpret them anew. The Gietrzwałd “revelations” have much in common with other Marian apparitions, but it is worth noting that every appearance of the Mother of God on Earth is special and unique. There are some differences among the revelations, which suggest a reason for the selection of a given place for Mary’s visit. There is a need to look closely at the apparitions in Gietrzwałd, as this is a site in Poland where the events have been officially recognized by the Catholic Church as true and authentic, but despite that, they are not widely known or valued. The 140th anniversary of those apparitions is a good chance to increase awareness of them, particularly Mary’s widespread wish for us to pray the rosary every day.

Keywords: Marian apparitions, Gietrzwałd, La Salette, Kibeho, Fatima, Lourdes.

Introduction

The saying of Stanisław Jachowicz: “You praise the strange, you don’t see your home, you do not know, what you own” fits perfectly with Gietrzwałd. So far, the Gietrzwałd apparitions are the only ones in Poland, which have been officially recognized by the Catholic Church as true and authentic. Polish pilgrims know Fatima, Lourdes, La Salette, but Gietrzwałd is forgotten. Gietrzwałd is a small village located among hills, lakes and forests, in the Warmia region in Poland.¹ Here, from June 27th till September 16th 1877, Mary appeared more than 160 times.² The meaning of these apparitions and the merits of what was revealed can be better understood in the reference to the apparitions in La

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¹ J. Obłąk, *Gietrzwałd*, Olsztyn 1979, p. 9.

² M. Zientara-Malewska, *Gietrzwałd – dzieje polskości*, Warszawa 1976, p. 43.

Salette, Lourdes, Fatima and Kibeho. It is important to concentrate on the similarities and differences between them because, in this way, one can better understand the real meaning and purpose of these apparitions. The goal of the apparitions is to strengthen the faith of Christians, and the words spoken by Mary become a source of hope and courage for all of those who are sad. The words spoken by Mary with motherly love have not lost their meaning, therefore in the times of globalization and the promotion of ill-understood freedom, they are still a vow to keep the Christian spirit in thinking and acting. Mary's apparitions also remind us about the presence and activity of Satan, who up until now has tried to diminish and conceal them, as well as create mischief and chaos to draw as many people as possible as far from God as he can. Mary's visits on Earth are caused by the hapless state of the people. Mary calls for repentance and conversion, sheds tears, warns against evil, because her deepest desire is to lead humanity to Redemption. This truth directs all, as was said to child visionaries who could see and hear Mary, and the signs, health restorations and prophetic warnings, as confirmed by the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church *Lumen Gentium*: "Taken up to heaven, she did not lay aside this salvific duty, but by her constant intercession continued to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and cults, until they are led into the happiness of their true home. Therefore, the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix and Mediatrix."³

The apparitions in La Salette, Lourdes, Fatima and Kibeho have many common features with the apparitions in Gietrzwałd, but each of them is special and unique. Below, I concentrate on their similarities. None of these apparitions happened in churches or chapels, but in the open air (with the exception of Kibeho, which took place in a school for girls⁴). Mary always appeared herself when people did not live according to God's Amendments. She appeared when the spiritual life of her children was endangered.⁵ The Mother of God appears herself in particularly hard times for a given nation.⁶ In the 19th century in France, religion was neglected. People turned their backs on God. Rationalism had become widespread and humanity believed that it was now the master of the world and it would decide how the world would be.⁷ The 19th century was also an exceptionally hard time for the Polish nation. Poland was divided between its

³ LG, n. 62.

⁴ A. Jakacki, *Kibeho. Dlaczego płaczesz, Maryjo?*, Ząbki 2013, p. 21.

⁵ A. Święcicka, *Objawienia gietrzwałdzkie a współczesne objawienia maryjne*, Kraków 2017, p. 85.

⁶ G. Hierzenberger, O. Nedomansky, *Księga objawień maryjnych od I do XX wieku*, Warszawa 2003, p. 5.

⁷ J. Żelawski, *Niepokalanej w holdzie*, Kraków 2012, p. 226.

three neighbours. In the Prussian partition, where Gietrzwałd was located, under the Bismarck government, there was an ideological-political campaign named *Kulturkampf*. According to this campaign, the occupier imposed Germanization on Warmia and its inhabitants (mostly Poles).⁸ In Portugal, Freemasonry ruled and the Church was persecuted. During Mary’s apparitions in Fatima, the World War I (“The Great War”) was well underway. In Kibeho, despite the fact that a century before Mary’s apparition, Christianity had been already present, the worship of idols and other pagan traditions still persisted.⁹

Mary, during her apparitions, warned against events which are to come. In France, she warned against hunger and asked for prayers for sinners or else a punishment would befall them.¹⁰ In Poland announced times of freedom for the Church, but she said it will happen if the people will pray on rosary every day.¹¹ In Portugal she warned against World War II, communism and terrorism.¹² In Kibeho she warned against homicide, and her prophecy was fulfilled: 13 years later – a million people had been murdered within 100 days in Rwanda.¹³

Witnesses of the Mary’s apparitions had a lot in common. All of them were a group (in Fatima), of up to “teen-agers” (La Salette, Lourdes, Gietrzwałd and Kibeho). They were simple, honest, modest and innocent. They came from poor families and from small villages.¹⁴

The apparitions were accompanied by miraculous phenomena and the “Beautiful Lady” was always a young woman, radiating unusual brightness.¹⁵ During the apparitions in Fatima, a multitude of pilgrims watched “the sun dancing in the sky.”¹⁶

It is worth to paying attention to how the Mary introduced herself in those places. In Lourdes, she named herself the *Immaculate Conception*.¹⁷ In Gietrzwałd, when visionaries asked “Who are you?”, she responded: “I am the Most Holy Virgin Mary, Immaculately Conceived.”¹⁸ In La Salette, the two visionaries saw a “Beautiful Lady” who was very sad and shed tears.¹⁹ In Fatima, Mary said to Luka that God wanted to use her as a tool, and to introduce

⁸ J. Buszko, *Historia Polski 1864–1948*, Warszawa 1988, p. 81; M. Zientara-Malewska, *Gietrzwałd – dzieje polskości*, p. 26–27.

⁹ A. Jakacki, *Kibeho. Dlaczego płaczesz, Maryjo?*, p. 19.

¹⁰ *La Salette opis zjawienia i sens orędzia*, Kraków 1985, p. 23.

¹¹ E. Paukszta, *Warmia i Mazury*, Katowice 1975, p. 84.

¹² L. Gonzaga da Fonseca, *Cuda Fatimy. Objawienia, kult, orędzie*, Częstochowa 2007, p. 166.

¹³ A. Jakacki, *Kibeho. Dlaczego płaczesz, Maryjo?*, p. 220.

¹⁴ A. Święcicka, *Objawienia gietrzwałdzkie*, p. 214.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ A. Borelli, *Fatima Orędzie tragedii czy nadziei?*, Kraków 2008, p. 67.

¹⁷ F. Trochu, *Święta Bernadeta Soubirous. Siostra Maria Bernarda ze Zgromadzenia Sióstr Miłości i Wychowania chrześcijańskiego w Meiers (1844–1879)*, Niepokalanów 1986, p. 119.

¹⁸ *Orędzie gietrzwałdzkie wczoraj i dziś*, ed. K. Parzych, Olsztyn 2005, p. 23.

¹⁹ *La Salette opis zjawienia i sens orędzia*, Kraków 1985, p. 8.

a devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.²⁰ In Kibeho, Mary introduced herself as the *Mother of the World*.²¹

In the apparitions, Mary always spoke with the language of her people. She taught them how to find God in simple matters of everyday life, as the Word of God reveals itself in a given, particular reality in the history of God's people. Mary is fulfilling God's plan, as ancient prophets did, and during the apparitions, she reminds us about God's Kingdom. In the places of the apparitions, Mary grieved because of a lack of faith of her children. In Fatima and in Kibeho, she stressed the value of suffering, but in Lourdes and in Gietrzwałd she asked for a prayer for the Church and emphasized the rank of the Eucharist.²² In each of Mary's messages, the value of prayer is stressed. The prayer, which was especially preferred and promoted by Mary, is the rosary.²³ In Lourdes, she had a rosary with her. In Gietrzwałd, she was praying together with her people, and her 160 appearances in this place are proof that there was a great need for prayer in Warmia. After the events in Gietrzwałd, there arose a custom to pray the rosary three times a day.²⁴ After the events in Fatima, a new service to the Immaculate Heart of Mary was introduced, performed every first Saturday of a month. Also, the so-called "Fatima rosary" (a version/extension of the prayer) was created.²⁵ In Kibeho, Mary asked to pray the rosary "to her seven pains."²⁶ During events in La Salette, she asked for daily prayer, asked not to call on the name of the Lord in vain, and not to work on Sundays.²⁷

In all the five apparition sites, Mary asked to build a church or a chapel, so that the people could worship her Son. In La Salette, the Shrine of Our Lady of Weeping was erected, and in Lourdes – the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In Gietrzwałd, there was already a church, so a small chapel was built on the exact spot of the apparitions. In Fatima – the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fatima, and in Kibeho a chapel named "The Church of Our Lady of Sorrows" were built. The apparitions were always accompanied by actions of the forces of the devil to prevent the message from God from reaching people. In Gietrzwałd, Satan misled two of the four visionaries: the virgin Katarzyna Wieczorek and the widow Elżbieta Bilitewska. He tried to seduce the two younger visionaries (Justyna Szafrzyńska and Barbara

²⁰ J. Orchowski, *Potęga różańca*, Marki 1998, p. 23.

²¹ A. Jakacki, *Kibeho. Dlaczego płaczesz, Maryjo?*, p. 101.

²² M. H. Kotlarz, *Gietrzwałd polskie Lourdes*, Gdańsk 2007, p. 43.

²³ B. Günther, *Szatan istnieje naprawdę. Największy wróg człowieka*, Wrocław 1991, p. 156.

²⁴ S. Ryłko, *Laskami słynący obraz Matki Boskiej w Gietrzwałdzie*, Kraków 1995, p. 19.

²⁵ *Siostra Łucja mówi o Fatimie (Wspomnienia siostry Łucji)*, zebrał o. L. Kondor SVD, Fatima 1989, p. 180.

²⁶ A. Jakacki, *Kibeho. Dlaczego płaczesz, Maryjo?*, p. 285.

²⁷ *La Salette opis*, p. 22.

Samulowska) as well, by appearing to them as the Virgin Mary in the house of a seamstress named Henning.²⁸ In Fatima, at the time of apparitions, a downpour fell on the municipality, but despite it the clothes worn by visionaries remained dry and nothing was able to disrupt the vision. In Kibeho, Satan was manifesting his presence very strongly, by – among other things – physically attacking the visionaries and shredding their clothes. Marie-Claire was assaulted by two strange people in long, black and ugly dresses, who cursed her and spat on her. Another Kibeho visionary – Alphonsine – stated that she constantly felt a devilish presence, and during prayer she heard evil whispers. Satan also attacked the third of the Kibeho visionaries – Nathalie. The girl was regularly frightened by a big, strong, well-build man, wearing a black coat and wielding a big stick. The evil was also manifested as a huge animal thumping its hoofs on the ground. The remedy for the girls was holy water and sacraments, which were successful in combating the devilish presences.²⁹

Very often there was a water source present near the apparition spots. Water symbolizes purity and quenches thirst. It was this way in Lourdes and Gietrzwałd, and the sources blessed by Mary serves till now and are famous for many healings and blessings. One can confirm this by studying the parish books in Gietrzwałd and the other apparition sites.

In Mary’s apparitions there are similarities, but one can also notice some differences. The first thing that differentiates Gietrzwałd from all others is the presence of a temple (with the icon of Mary) in the place of appearance, before the Marian events. This was not the case in any of the four other places. Pilgrims had been coming to Gietrzwałd even before the Marian appearance in this place.³⁰ In the remaining four places there was nothing, not even a chapel. Mary herself asked to build the shrine, or the faithful started the construction themselves.

In Gietrzwałd, Mary addressed people who were very distressed and oppressed by invaders. Poland was divided between Prussia, Austria and Russia and did not exist as a sovereign state on the maps of Europe. In Gietrzwałd, she said that there was such a place where she – the *Queen of Poland* – stayed with her children and guarded this post of Polishness. The Gietrzwałd apparitions contain anthropologic content, because Mary demanded the right of a nation to its own language, tradition, culture and faith. She talked to children in Polish, in a place where the invader had banned its use. Different than in La Salette, Lourdes, and Fatima, where Mary comes to a society neglected intellectually

²⁸ *Ozędzie gietrzwałdzkie*, p. 26.

²⁹ A. Jakacki, *Kibeho. Dlaczego płaczesz, Maryjo?*, p. 156.

³⁰ W. Nowak, *Historia obrazu i kultu Matki Boskiej Gietrzwałdzkiej*, „Studia Warmińskie” vol. 14, 1977, p. 115.

and spiritually, in Gietrzwałd Mary came to give comfort to the tormented Polish nation, saying: “Do not be sad, because I will always be with you.”³¹

The Gietrzwałd “revelations” are unique also because of this situation: when Mary appears, she does not speak at first, and only responds to the girls’ questions (the first being: “What do you demand?”, and the second: “Who are you?”). Also, the number of appearances of Mary in Gietrzwałd is unusual – she appears herself more than 160 times, which is more than at all other four places combined (in La Salette once, Lourdes – eighteen, Fatima – six, and Kibeho between 10 and 20).

In Gietrzwałd, Mary stressed that the Eucharist is the most important of all types of devotions or services.³² She called for conversion, and especially requested to pray for priests, because they celebrate the Eucharist in the name of her Son.

The Gietrzwałd apparitions also involved a wide-scale sobriety action. In Gietrzwałd, Mary requested that the Polish nation be sober. It is worth noting, that in a small village like Gietrzwałd (it had only 353 inhabitants at the time³³) there were several inns, where people were losing not only health and money, but also their dignity. Moreover, the invaders paid with alcohol for all services rendered to their authority, in order to easier manipulate and subdue the local society.

Satan struggled very much to make the Gietrzwałd “revelation” forgotten, hidden from the world. Despite much solid proof of the authenticity of the message from Marian apparitions (they were very well researched and documented right from the start) it took exactly one hundred years for them to be officially recognized by the Catholic Church.³⁴

During the last few appearances of Mary in Gietrzwałd – especially on the day of Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (September 8th) – a large group of pilgrims came to Gietrzwałd. Many of them experienced fear and strange phenomena. It happened that two gendarmes, who were keeping order, became so frightened that one of them fled, and the other converted.

The other ecumenical aspect of the message of Gietrzwałd is also notable. Pilgrims from all over Europe – including many Protestants – were praying together. They prayed for religious freedom, and nowadays, when the Europe is uniting, this is very important. Now that the Polish-German dialogue is well under way, this place and its message should surface again, so that Europe and

³¹ *Orędzie gietrzwałdzkie*, p. 30.

³² M.H. Kotlarz, *Gietrzwałd polskie Lourdes*, Gdańsk 2007, p. 43.

³³ *Orędzie gietrzwałdzkie*, p. 190.

³⁴ A. Świącicka, *Objawienia gietrzwałdzkie*, p. 151; *Dekret Biskupa Warmińskiego Józefa Drzazgi*, „Studia Warmińskie” vol. 14, 1977, p. 5.

the world will see that only dialogue among differences is the way forward to peace and harmony, which has been repeated many times by Saint John Paul II.

We now live in times of increasing globalization, according to which we eagerly learn foreign languages and foreign cultures. Gietrzwałd still remains a nexus of Polish culture, of Christianity, and motivates the promotion of Polish affairs, Polish history, tradition and the Catholic faith. Mary, through her apparitions, tried to prevent the misery of her children. She warned against the looming end of world and she wanted people to convert, correct and pray for peace. Pilgrimage to the apparition sites renovates and reinvigorates the Church, reveals the ways to reach to God, where God reaches us – exactly as Saint John Paul II perceived, calling them the *signs of the times*.³⁵ The message given by Mary in Gietrzwałd is still very up-to-date, still important for each human being struggling with the pressures of everyday life. These messages bring hope, because of the foretelling of the victory of good over evil. A pilgrimage causes one to enrich herself/himself internally, and Mary’s guidance resonates with the evangelical call of Jesus to conversion. Mary, being faithful to her Son, reminds us that the time is ripe and the Kingdom of God is near. The Marian message shows the way to Jesus, by prayer, repentance and religious conversion. The common features of these messages let us see what God likes the most and what He expects from humankind. The especially required features are: to be simple, clean, pure, modest and humble.

The sanctuary in Gietrzwałd, similarly to other apparition locations, is the place where the faithful people experience holiness, which Saint John Paul II encouraged when he spoke to a large group of pilgrims from Poland to the Vatican: “Travel to Gietrzwałd! There the Mother of God calls you to holiness! There is your place!”³⁶

The Mary apparitions are an incentive to visit the places which have been selected by God. There is one condition: one has to abandon the “method of glass and eye”, to go there with a pure and humble heart – as one goes to one’s mother – so that she can listen and help. The undervalued messages of Gietrzwałd still wait for wide and deep recognition, so that this place stops functioning only as museum where some unusual things happened long time ago. It is important for the contemporary Church to recall the Marian events in Gietrzwałd as a place selected by God Himself!

³⁵ T. Siudy, *Objawienia maryjne w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II*, in: *Wokół objawień maryjnych*, ed. T. Siudy, Częstochowa 2009, p. 104.

³⁶ J. Żelawski, *Opowieść o zapomnianym Gietrzwałdzie*, Kraków 2004, p. 298.

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„Objawienia” w Gietrzwałdzie i współczesne objawienia maryjne

Streszczenie: „Objawienia” w Gietrzwałdzie i współczesne objawienia Maryi są przedmiotem analizy wartym odnotowania, tym bardziej że w czerwcu 2017 r. obchodziliśmy 140. rocznicę objawień maryjnych w Gietrzwałdzie. Święty Jan Paweł II postrzegał objawienia jako znaki czasu, nad którymi Kościół nieustannie się zastanawia, aby je odczytać i ponownie zinterpretować. Objawienia gietrzwałdzkie mają wiele wspólnego z innymi objawieniami maryjnymi, ale należy zauważyć, że każde pojawienie się Matki Bożej na ziemi jest wyjątkowe i unikatowe. Istnieją pewne różnice między objawieniami, które sugerują powód wyboru danego miejsca na wizytę Maryi. Stąd należy inaczej postrzegać objawienia Maryi w Gietrzwałdzie, ponieważ jest to miejsce w Polsce, gdzie wydarzenia zostały oficjalnie uznane przez Kościół katolicki za prawdziwe i autentyczne, choć nie są powszechnie znane ani docenione. Objawienia gietrzwałdzkie należy upowszechniać, zwłaszcza w zakresie najważniejszego życzenia Maryi, aby każdego dnia odmawiać różaniec.

Słowa kluczowe: objawienia maryjne, Gietrzwałd, La Salette, Kibeho, Fatima, Lourdes.