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Debate continues over publication of JPII's letters

Jonathan Luxmoore Catholic News Service | Jun. 11, 2009

WARSAW, Poland -- A Polish archbishop has urged people with letters from John Paul II not to publish them out of respect for the late pontiff.

t"If such letters are somewhere in the family, let's keep them as a great sacredness, a kind of souvenir. Let's not put them in print," Archbishop Jozef Zycinski of Lublin said.

"Publishing papal letters is a sign of narcissism, a wish to be noticed. It suggests the Holy Father showed special trust in me by discussing particular problems in his letters. We can do without this," the archbishop said on Lublin's Radio eR.
tThe archbishop was reacting to controversy over the publication of the late pontiff's correspondence with a Polish psychiatrist, Wanda Poltawska, with whom the former pope enjoyed a 58-year friendship.

tSpeaking to the radio station, Zycinski said the book had caused "an atmosphere of conjectures, insinuations and sharp polemics."

t"The pope tried to treat all his letter writers with respect. He never rebuked them or said what they'd written was immature or unserious," said Zycinski, whose statement was carried June 8 by Poland's *Gazeta Wyborcza* daily.
t"When the contents of such letters are taken out of context today, with some mentorial commentary about how the church should change, it can look as if, through not protesting, John Paul II shared the same view," he explained.

tPoltawska, a survivor of the Nazi Ravensbruck and Neustadt-Gleve concentration camps, launched her book February 17 at the Polish Bishops Conference secretariat in Warsaw, with a foreword by its president, Archbishop Jozef Michalik of Przemysl.
tIn an introduction, she said she had been asked to publish the letters by John Paul II, who had personally approved most of the material, adding that she still had a "suitcase of letters" which would not be released until after her death.

tHowever, the decision to release the correspondence was criticized by Pope John Paul II's former secretary, Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz, who told Italy's *La Stampa* daily June 1 Poltawska had "exaggerated" the friendship and "usurped for herself a unique relationship and special link which didn't exist in reality."

tMeanwhile, Italian newspapers said the book could delay John Paul II's beatification process by creating extra work for the Rome tribunal.

tFr. Tomasz Lubas, director of the Krakow-based Edycja Swietego Pawla, which published the book, told Poland's Catholic information agency June 2 the manuscript had been submitted before publication to the tribunal, adding that he and Poltawska had shown "constant care and attention" to ensure it would not disrupt the process.

tMeanwhile, Poltawska also defended the book and said she believed she had the same right to publish the writings of Pope John Paul as Cardinal Dziwisz and other friends and colleagues of the pontiff.

t"The pope wanted me to give this testimony when I spoke to him before his death. Nothing else matters to me," the 87-year-old said in a story published in the June 14 edition of the weekly Catholic *Tygodnik Powszechny*.

t"I wanted to bring people closer to the Holy Father's spirituality, whereas Cardinal Dziwisz wishes to keep his experiences to himself," she said.

tThe psychiatrist, who first met the then-Father Karol Wojtyla when he heard her confession, accompanied him on hiking and camping trips, and corresponded with him on spiritual and religious topics.

tIn the book, she described visits to the papal summer residence at Castel Gandolfo and how she read to the dying pope at his Rome bedside.

tIn a June 7 commentary, Fr. Adam Boniecki, *Tygodnik Powszechny*'s editor, said the book's spiritual contents surpassed works by George Weigel and other writers, and testified to Poltawska's "exceptional closeness" to the late pontiff.

t"What is this book supposed to be undermining, the fact that a priest, bishop, cardinal and pope didn't extinguish in himself the capacity for friendship and love?" Boniecki wrote.

t"The deep friendship linking saints with women never diminished their sanctity, just the opposite. Perhaps it's the sick imagination of the commentators, not this beautiful book about friendship, which is the main cause of the problems," he wrote.

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