
Hetmanka and Mother:

Representing the Virgin Mary

in Modern Poland

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When Karol Wojtyła became Pope John Paul II in 1978, he proclaimed that the slogan for his papacy would be ‘*Totus Tuus*’ (totally yours). The “you” to whom he was addressing this commitment was the Virgin Mary, Blessed Mother, Queen of Heaven, Handmaiden of the Lord, *Mater Dolorosa*, Woman of Valour, Paragon of Chastity, Supreme Mediatrix and (certainly not least) Queen of Poland. As suggested by this list of her titles (and there are many more – the popular *Litany of Loreto* includes forty-nine invocations), Mary is what we might today call “multivalent”. Over the centuries of Roman Catholic history, she has been made to carry a wide variety of meanings and serve a multitude of purposes. Nonetheless, she isn’t *quite* all things to all people: when one invokes the Virgin, one must contend with a conceptual legacy that both constrains what one may say and grants (sometimes unintended) significance to what one does say. This legacy is heavily determined by an officially sanctioned Catholic theology that provides a great deal of continuity across time and space, but culturally distinctive metaphors and local shifts in emphasis nonetheless allow Mary to assume a variety of forms. Just as, for example, Mexico’s Virgin of Guadalupe has been configured to play an important role in that country’s discussion of indigenous rights and just as the Virgin of Lourdes has been deployed in debates about rationalism and secularisation in France, so has Poland’s Virgin developed alongside that country’s ongoing preoccupation with “the national question”.¹

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¹ On Mary and Marianism, see Michael Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Eamon Duffy, *What Catholics Believe about Mary* (London: CTS Publications, 1989); Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1985); Michael O’Carroll, *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1982); Joseph Paredes, *Mary and the Kingdom of God: A Synthesis of Mariology* (Slough: St Paul Publications, 1991); Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Quartet Books, 1978). On Guadalupe, see D. A. Brading, *Mexican Phoenix: Our Lady of Guadalupe: Image and Tradition across Five Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Ana Castillo, ed., *Goddess of the Americas/La Diosa de las Américas: Writings on the*

For many, the Marian cult virtually defines Catholic spirituality. Rather than fading against the onslaught of modernity (as some had predicted), the Marian strain in Catholicism has only intensified over the last two centuries. This is particularly true in Poland. Since at least 1656, when she was crowned Queen of Poland by King Jan Kazimierz, she has stood at the very centre of the Polish homiletic tradition and has served as an object of deeply felt devotion for countless ordinary believers. Few Catholic homes in Poland lack a reproduction of the Virgin of Częstochowa and it is no coincidence that the country's largest Catholic radio station is called "Radio Maryja". A century ago, Archbishop Józef Bilczewski affirmed Poland's bond with the Virgin:

What God has joined together, let no man put asunder. God has joined Mary and our nation . . . Mary has established roots among us more deeply than anywhere else, because together with the Catholic faith, her veneration has penetrated to the very foundation of the nation, has become a constituent part of the Polish soul, has left its mark on our traditions and customs. Our nation – I won't hesitate to say it – is the most Marian of all nations. Our history, throughout the centuries, is virtually a history of Mary in the nation.²

Even a casual traveler to Poland will notice the pervasive Marian cult: today there are more than 800 Catholic shrines in the country, and 700 of these are devoted to the Virgin.³

But what does it mean to pray to Mary in Poland? Individual believers will always attribute to the Virgin idiosyncratic and often mutually contradictory qualities, but if we survey a wide array of Church sources (from episcopal pronouncements to theological tracts to Sunday sermons) we can observe some repeated themes. This article will offer a bird's-eye view of Polish Marianism over the past century and a half in an attempt to identify these broad themes – the recurring metaphors that generations of Catholic priests and lay activists have used to speak about the Virgin. My focus will be on the relatively stable tropes of orthodox Marianism, as propagated in devotional literature, sermons and the pronouncements of priests and bishops. A number of excellent studies have explored Marian worship within the context of popular religious practice and the individual prayers of rank-and-file Catholics.⁴ To offer a counterpoint to these works, I shall look at the other side of the dialogue between doctrine and devotion, turning to the clergy and the lay elites who attempted

Virgin of Guadalupe (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996). On Lourdes, see Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (London: Allen Lane, 1999).

² Józef Bilczewski, *Królowa Korony Polskiej: List Pastorski z okazji odnowienia ślubów Jana Kazimierza na kongresie Maryjańskim we Lwowie* (Lwów: Drukarnia Katolicka Józefa Chęcińskiego, 1904), 16. All translations are by the author.

³ "Kościół na przełomie wieków," *Rzeczpospolita* 63 (15 March 2003). See also Andrzej Datko, "Sanktuaria i pielgrzymki: patnictwo w Polsce po 1945 roku", in *Kościół i religijność Polaków 1945–1999*, Witold Zdaniewicz and Tadeusz Zembrzuski, eds., (Warsaw: Pallotinum, 2000).

⁴ Among the best studies on popular Marian devotion are David Blackburn, *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in a Nineteenth-Century German Village* (New York: Random House, 1995); Michael P. Carroll, *Madonnas that Maim: Popular Catholicism in Italy since the Fifteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); William Christian, *Person and God in a Spanish Valley*, 2nd edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880–1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

to systematise, propagate and enforce Catholic teachings. My focus will be the Mary encountered by Polish Catholics in their catechism classes and during mass, the unifying ideas and ideals that made the cult of the Virgin recognisable in all its varied manifestations.

Polish Marianism, I shall argue, gains much of its power from the way in which it links seemingly contradictory models of femininity within a national (or even nationalist) worldview. Mary, the Queen of Poland, has been offered to the faithful as a model for conceptualising the feminine within the nation, a model which is flexible enough to endure because it rests on a basic dichotomy: on the one hand, Mary is a powerful, sometimes militant protector of Poland; on the other hand, she is an exemplar of feminine domesticity. She guides the nation to victory even as she demonstrates how to sustain the national hearth and home. Polish national rhetoric has shifted over the years back and forth between geopolitical ambitions and the disciplining of social relations, and Polish Marianism has smoothly shifted along with it. Sarah Jane Boss has argued that Mary's image in Western Christianity has changed over the centuries, moving from the mighty Queen Mother of medieval devotion (typically depicted enthroned, either supporting the infant Jesus on her lap or receiving a crown from the adult Jesus) to a more submissive, quiet, passive figure in the modern era (usually displayed alone, as a young woman).⁵ In Poland, at least, this transition has been less pronounced: her royal power continues to be evoked in the struggle against the nation's enemies, even as her function as a model of obedience, domesticity and compassion has been emphasised. A mortal woman might find it hard to contain such divergent personae, to move from the battlefield to the kitchen without one role undermining the other. Mary, however, has the advantage of being both a terrestrial woman and the mightiest of all saints, and a mystical duality lies at the very foundation of her cult. She provides an image of authority and power which ultimately (perhaps paradoxically) poses little challenge to traditional norms of femininity – indeed, she is frequently called upon to fortify those norms. Marianism thus provides some of the glue that helps hold together two otherwise distinct strains of Polish national thought, one focused on maintaining conservative gender relations and the other on attaining victory in the international realm. Simultaneously, her position as a national patron in Poland has helped the Virgin retain her image as queen even as her royal authority has lost resonance in much of the West.

Poles have been praying to Mary since the conversion of the country to Christianity more than a thousand years ago. The oldest extant song in the Polish language is a hymn called *Bogurodzica* (she who bore God) which Polish warriors sang before

⁵ Sarah Jane Boss, *Empress and Handmaid: On Nature and Gender in the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Cassell, 2000). Boss points to a linkage between maternity and authority in medieval Marianism and argues that the Virgin's changing image has tracked a diminution in the power ascribed to motherhood more generally. In contrast to Boss, Loreto Echeverria and Nicholas Perry argue that Marianism is inextricably linked to right-wing militarism in the twentieth century. See Echeverria and Perry, *Under the Heel of Mary* (New York: Routledge, 1988). See Boss, *Empress*, 18, for a response to their work.

their victory over the Teutonic Knights at Grunwald in 1410. It was, however, the battle of Częstochowa in 1655 that propelled Mary to the very centre of Catholic devotion in Poland. During a time of domestic chaos and foreign invasion that came to be called “The Deluge”, a Swedish army laid siege to the fortified monastery of Jasna Góra near the town of Częstochowa, which possessed an ancient icon of the Virgin that was reputed to work miracles. The battle of Częstochowa, as a victory of Catholic Poles over Protestant Swedes at a Marian shrine, had obvious symbolic power. Publicists loyal to King Jan Kazimierz took full advantage of this victory, and it became the war’s turning point. After peace was restored, and against the backdrop of the Counter-Reformation Church’s effort to entrench orthodox Catholicism in what had been a notoriously pluralistic and heterodox country, the king staged an elaborate ceremony at which the icon of Częstochowa was crowned as “Queen of Poland”. From this point, Jasna Góra became the country’s leading site of Catholic pilgrimage and devotion, and the Virgin of Częstochowa would remain one of the most familiar images in the repertoire of national symbolism.

From this story comes one of the central elements of the Polish Marian cult: the Virgin as the military protector of the Polish nation. Certainly the Poles were not alone in invoking Mary’s help in battle, but they were particularly fond of this tactic. In 1683, when King Jan Sobieski led the combined armies of central Europe against the Ottoman siege of Vienna, he proclaimed that his victory should be credited to the Virgin’s support. A century later, a popular battle song for Polish soldiers included these lines:

For the cause of the nation and the Virgin Mary
We serve the Virgin, who gave birth to God
Under her sign we dedicate our swords
Under her protection is the road to victory
She, with her word, will crush the might of the devil.⁶

In the eighteenth and particularly the nineteenth centuries, reproductions of the Virgin were often used on battle flags, and Mary’s intervention on behalf of the *antemurales christianitatis*, as Poles liked to call their country, was persistently evoked by those seeking to regain national independence. A nineteenth-century guidebook for pilgrimages to Częstochowa offered a set of hymns and poems to Mary, and every one of them focused on the Virgin’s help in attaining Poland’s national restoration – none appealed to her for personal, individual, maternal aid, as would have been typical at the time for Marian shrines in Western Europe, such as Lourdes or La Salette. Zygmunt Krasiński’s poem “To the Crowned Queen of Poland” was among the patriotic verses reprinted in this volume:

Queen of Poland, we appeal to You,
Come to our aid, we call for help,

⁶ This song originated with the Bar Confederation (1768–72). The complete text is reprinted in Ewa Jabłońska-Deptuła, *Czyż może historia popłynąć przeciw prądowi sumień? Kościół—Religia—Patriotyzm, 1764–1864* (Paris: Editions Spotkania, 1987), 21–3.

Save us, save us, merciful Mary
Vanquish the enemy's stubborn fury.⁷

When leading the nation in this way, Mary was not only Poland's queen, but also the supreme *Hetmanka*. In pre-partition Poland, the *Hetman* was the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, the one who actually led the troops into battle. The feminine form of this rank was reserved exclusively for the Virgin and was frequently listed alongside her royal title.⁸ For example, a "Marian Congress" held in Lwów in September 1904 issued a proclamation announcing that "the trumpet call of Mary has begun to play, summoning the entire Nation to a meeting, the goal of which will be to proclaim once again that the Immaculate Mother of God is the *Hetmanka* and Queen of the Nation".⁹ Mary was both monarch and field commander, both the crowned embodiment of power and the active leader of Polish troops in battle. She was more than just an inspiration for the soldiers; she was the one who guided them to victory, the actual *cause* of their triumphs.

When the Poles defeated the Bolshevik armies in August 1920, many in the Church dubbed the victory the "Miracle on the Vistula", and attributed it to Mary's intervention. As one priest put it a decade later, "every unbiased observer must acknowledge that the resurrection of our Fatherland did not come about just thanks to the wisdom of our politicians or the weapons of our armies, but above all thanks to Mary, whom we justly honour and praise as the Queen of Poland".¹⁰ When military danger re-emerged in the 1930s, Mary was again looked to for aid. Pilgrims to Częstochowa in 1936 were told by a Catholic student activist that "if our Fatherland could be and has been the bastion of Christianity, this must be attributed to a large extent to the Most Holy Virgin Mary, whom our fathers worshiped so much . . . As our Fatherland stands between the godless red leadership of the Kremlin and the racist nationalism of the brown Germans, where could we ever find better help and rescue than with the Crowned Queen of Poland?"¹¹ The September 1939 issue of the Marian monthly *Rycerz Niepokalanej* (The Knights of the Immaculate) expressed the conviction that Poland could count on the leadership and aid of the Virgin, the *Hetmanka* who would ensure Poland's victory during the coming "defence of Christian Europe against the onslaught of godlessness and neopaganism".¹² After Poland fell quickly to the combined Nazi and Soviet invasions,

⁷ *Pamiętka z Jasnej Góry* (Warsaw: T. H. Nasierowski, n.d.), 17. This volume was an extreme case of casting Mary in national rather than personal terms – the only one I have found that focused *exclusively* on Mary as *Hetmanka*. Nonetheless, some form of this imagery is prominent in nearly all the devotional texts from nineteenth or twentieth-century Częstochowa.

⁸ My thanks to Wojciech Bieltkiewicz for pointing out that the queen in the game of chess is sometimes called the *hetman* in Polish. Nonetheless, the specific feminine form of *hetmanka* seems unique to Mary.

⁹ *Program Kongresu Maryjańskiego* (Lwów, 28–9 September 1904), 2.

¹⁰ Ireneusz Kmiecik, *Misje Ludowe: 50 kazań misyjnych, rekolekcyjnych i okolicznościowych* (Kraków: Klasztor OO. Reformatów, 1930), 402.

¹¹ Przedstawiciel Krakowa, "Maryja jedynym ratunkiem naszym", in *Ślubujemy: Echa pielgrzymki akademickiej na Jasną Górę, 24 Maja 1936* (Toruń: Instytut Wydawnictw Różańcowych, 1936), 31–2.

¹² "Doświadczylismy co znaczy żyć bez wolności i raczej umrzemy, aniżeli utracimy znowu wolności", *Rycerz Niepokalanej*, 18, 9 (September 1939), 275.

some in the Church could only make sense of this by presuming that they were enduring divine punishment, that Mary had withheld her aid because the nation no longer deserved to be helped. The exiled Polish primate, August Cardinal Hlond, proclaimed in 1942 that “the cataclysm is a result of the de-Christianisation of life, it is a consequence of the apostasy against Christ and His laws, it is a result of the return to paganism”. When the Poles regained independence, he continued, they would have to show that they had learned their lesson: “Respect for divine law must return. The new era will not be an era of the godless, the apostates, the tyrants, the rapacious horde; it will not be an era of comfort, exploitation, egoism, divorce or cabarets, but an era of honest, diligent work and hard life, of good manners, a cohesive family, love of one’s neighbour, human and fraternal solidarity”.¹³

When *Rycerz Niepokalanej* reappeared in 1945, an editorial introduction on the inside front cover proclaimed the magazine’s ambition “to bring cheer after so many painful losses, to renew the faith [of our readers], and to strengthen love for the Immaculate *Hetmanka*”.¹⁴ Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński, the primate from 1948 to 1980, similarly turned to the Virgin for comfort and aid during those difficult post-war years, and throughout the communist era. At the same time, however, he tried to back away from some of the doctrinally slippery implications of the *Hetmanka* metaphor. Shortly after his elevation to the primacy, he issued a pastoral letter in which he called Poland “the chosen nation of the Mother of God”, but he elaborated on this by explaining in very careful language that “the Lord, through Mary, has often brought shame to our enemies. The History of the Nation has recorded a whole series of grand victories that are attributed to her intercession . . . Not with their own strength did our kings and hetmans conquer, but with the strength of God, who awoke in their hearts a living respect for Mary”.¹⁵ In this presentation, which is quite common in clerical writings, Mary does not possess her own autonomous power over earthly affairs – the actual agency belongs with God, and the Virgin appears as a humble mediatrix or intercessor. Wyszyński returned to God the powers that others had attributed, if only by implication, to Mary.

Wyszyński was certainly not the first to make this argument – it has always been present as a counterpoint to the more exuberant descriptions of Mary’s direct engagement with the world. Sensitive to accusations of polytheism, the clergy has worked hard to sustain the fine distinction between Mary’s intercession with God and unmediated action of her own, between *latria* (the adoration reserved for God alone), *dulia* (the reverence given to the saints) and *hyperdulia* (a special category of reverence postulated by St Thomas Aquinas for Mary). In this scheme, only *latria* entails an expectation of direct intervention in human affairs; the rest imply the

¹³ August Hlond, “Gdy przyjdzie petnia czasów”, in Hlond, *Na straży sumienia narodu: Wybór pism i przemówień*, ed. A. Stomka (Warsaw: Ad Astra, 1999), 224–8.

¹⁴ “Od wydawnictwa”, *Rycerz Niepokalanej* 19, 1 (July 1945), inside front cover.

¹⁵ Wyszyński, “Na dzień poświęcenia się Narodu Polskiego Niepokalanemu Sercu Maryi (Lublin, dnia 8 września 1946 r.)”, in Wyszyński, *Listy pasterskie*, 25.

intercession of the saint with God, who must then decide whether or not to act.¹⁶ The standard Marian prayer, established definitively by Pope Pius V in 1568, does not ask Mary to help us on her own, but only to put in a good word on our behalf: “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death”. A nineteenth-century Polish catechism explained the significance of this line: ‘When we say “pray for us”, we are signifying that the Virgin Mary is not omnipotent, that she is a created being, albeit the most perfect creation, so we do not say “give us” or “absolve our sins”, but we say “ask on our behalf”, “pray for us”.’¹⁷ More recently, Mirosław Piłśniak explained that “the honour we give Mary is not mainly a prayer to Mary, but a prayer with Mary”.¹⁸

There are some undeniable tensions between this doctrinal line and the *Hetmanka* metaphor. The latter posits a Virgin who demonstrates valour, honour and military might; she is imagined as a Joan of Arc figure, leading men into battle for God and Fatherland. Her role as intercessor is transposed upon a geopolitical stage, as the image of her beseeching God for mercy on behalf of her children is recast as a much more active participation in human affairs. She is not just watching over Poland, but forcefully “vanquishing the enemy’s stubborn fury” in order to preserve the country’s independence and domestic well-being, or vengefully punishing the Poles for their infidelity. Not only does this come very close to granting Mary her own autonomous divine powers, but it leads to an image of Polish men asking a woman for military assistance. To soften these implications, priests typically qualify their Marian appeals with reminders that only God can work miracles. Archbishop Józef Bilczewski exemplified this warning in 1904 by writing, “Let’s not turn Mary into a God. Let’s remember that Mary was created, and thus between her and God there is an infinite gap, which only love can fill. But at the same time, we must not forget even for a moment that there is also a gap between Mary and the rest of creation”.¹⁹ In popular religious practice these doctrinal niceties are often ignored, but among the clergy there is an evident need to sustain a clear distinction between *latria* and *hyperdulia*, between divine intervention and saintly intercession.

In a way, the tensions between the *Hetmanka* and the intercessor flow together in the idea of Mary as Queen of Poland: like a female monarch, she displays power yet cannot fully embody power. Her role is understood to be unique, and her authority is envisioned in a way that preserves the primacy of masculine agency (insofar as God and Jesus, the Father and Son, are envisioned as male – which they virtually always are within the Polish Catholic tradition). Nonetheless, this side of Polish Marianism is rich with possibilities for heterodox implications for both Catholic doctrine and gender norms. Indeed, many prayers to the *Hetmanka* come very close

¹⁶ On *latria*, *dulia* and *hyperdulia*, see Pelikan, 102. The difference between *intervention* (what God does) and *intercession* (what Mary and the saints do) is also stressed in Catholic writings.

¹⁷ Józef Krukowski, *Nauki katechizmowe na całość prawd wiary św. katolickiej*, 3rd edn (Kraków: Gebethner i spółki, 1880), 61.

¹⁸ Mirosław Piłśniak, “Z Maryją wybrać życie”, *List* (May 1997), <http://www.list.media.pl/old/listo597/maryja.html> (accessed 7 March 2003).

¹⁹ Bilczewski, *Królowa*, 6.

to implying that she possesses autonomous power and, more specifically, military prowess. Such an understanding of the Virgin would cross the boundary between orthodoxy and heresy, but even priests sometimes approach that line in moments of Marian enthusiasm. Mary the *Hetmanka* pushes the limits of both doctrinal clarity and gendered expectations, but the official teachings of the Church provide just enough theological cover to keep her within those boundaries.

Alongside the militant *Hetmanka* runs a different symbolic tradition, one which focuses on Mary the Exemplar rather than Mary the Mediatrix. Insofar as she continues to intervene in human affairs, to “fight” or “struggle” against her and Poland’s foes, the battleground shifts from the geopolitical stage to the home front (literally). Although Mary is still described in terms of her relationship to the Polish nation, she acts through individuals to fortify or perfect what are described as the foundations of national life – above all, the family. This Mary does not reign mightily on a grand historical stage, but establishes an intimate, maternal bond with the individual believer.

In Poland, as elsewhere in Europe, there was a marked increase in Marian devotion in the second half of the nineteenth century, accompanied by a dramatic wave of Marian apparitions. In 1877 the Virgin appeared in the village of Gietrzwałd, Warmia, giving the Poles their own counterpart to the more famous visitations at La Salette (1846), Lourdes (1858), Marpingen (1876) and Fatima (1917).²⁰ From 27 June to 16 September 1877, while the Gietrzwałd apparitions were occurring, an estimated 300,000 people visited the site, and thousands would arrive every Sunday for decades to come. Meanwhile, pilgrims were traveling to Częstochowa in greater and greater numbers. In the period immediately prior to the First World War, the Jasna Góra monastery was visited by 200,000 people a year – a fourfold increase compared with half a century earlier.²¹ The *Hetmanka* was a component of this popular Marianism, but perhaps even more important was Mary the Exemplar – the model for good Catholic behavior, particularly for women. She remained Queen of Heaven and of Poland, but a more personal Marian cult emerged, with a humanised and more intimate Mother. This Mary corresponded to the stereotypical femininity of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (in both its generally European and specifically Polish variants) – not the distant, powerful, sometimes vengeful, militant queen, but the long suffering, patient and emotional mother.

Mary the Exemplar has long been an established component of the Marian cult. As Pope Paul VI put it in 1967, “the co-operation of the Mother of the Church in the development of the divine life of the souls does not come to an end with the appeal

²⁰ Lourdes, Fatima, and La Salette are among the ten Marian apparitions that have received official recognition by the Church. Of these ten, only one (in Guadalupe) occurred before the nineteenth century. Marpingen was not acknowledged by Rome as genuine, nor was Gietrzwałd. See Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries*, 178. For a general survey of modern Marian apparitions, see Sandra Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary: Visions of Mary from La Salette to Medjugorje* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

²¹ On the growth of Marianism in Poland in the late nineteenth century, see Daniel Olszewski, *Polska kultura religijna na przełomie XIX i XX wieku* (Warsaw: PAX, 1996), 180–200.

to the Son. She exercises on redeemed men another influence: that of example”.²² A typical articulation of this gentler and explicitly feminine Marianism can be found in the work of Eleonora Ziemiecka, who could be described (anachronistically) as one of Poland’s first feminists. In the 1840s and 1850s, Ziemiecka advocated education for girls, claimed the right to engage in debates over philosophy and theology with men, and even asserted that women should be considered “people” fundamentally equal to, though different from, men. She even edited and published a monthly magazine devoted to literature and philosophy from 1842 to 1846, making her the first woman in Poland to hold such a position. But she defies our twenty-first-century expectations about feminism, because she did all this from within a highly conservative, even ultramontane Catholicism. For Ziemiecka, the Virgin Mary offered a way to integrate her ideas about women’s equality with her faith – not by turning to the militant Queen, but by arguing that Mary’s example of proper femininity was as good as (or better than) any possible model of modern masculinity. “God set over you a woman, who is to be your model”, wrote Ziemiecka. “That woman is the most blessed among all virgins, her name is Mary and her son is named Jesus. Her life ought to be a model for your lives; her immaculate purity ought to penetrate your purity; your gentleness ought to blossom from her gentleness, your love ought to flow forth from the enormous love of her heart”.²³ Mary the Exemplar was not a military saviour, but a source of moral refuge. For Ziemiecka, men dominated the spheres of “action” and “thought”, while women were granted by God the “mystery of love”. This gave women a marked advantage, in Ziemiecka’s presentation:

One half of society is in moral danger; the other is not. God in his infinite wisdom wanted women to restore that which men tore asunder . . . Women have retained that fortitude which does not belong exclusively to any sex but which men have lost because of their decadence and their doubting minds. Women have over their husbands the same sort of rule that a strong soul always has over a weak mind . . . Men have abandoned the path they were assigned. It is up to women to accept this duty and carry it out within the domestic hearth with the divine sobriety of a wife and mother . . . Providence has called forth women to save society.²⁴

Ziemiecka was claiming for women a role as protectors of the faith in an age she believed to be marked by masculine rationality and decadence. This intertwined her Marian exemplar with another enduring cultural model that was emerging at the same time: the *Matka-Polka* (mother-Pole).²⁵ Throughout the nineteenth century,

²² Paul VI, *Signum Magnum* (13 May 1967), in *The Papal Encyclicals Online* (<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paulo6/p6great.htm>). *Signum Magnum* offers no internal numeration.

²³ “Myśli o kobietach”, *Pielgrzym* (September 1846), 250.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 258–60.

²⁵ On the *Matka-Polka* model, and more generally on the image of women in national rhetoric in nineteenth-century Poland, see Robert Blobaum, “The ‘Woman Question’ in Russian Poland, 1900–1914”, *Journal of Social History*, 35, 4 (summer 2002), 799–824; Halina Filipowicz, “The Daughters of Emilia Plater”, in Pamela Chester and Sibelan Forrester, eds., *Engendering Slavic Literatures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 34–58; Halina Filipowicz, “Othering the Kościuszko Uprising: Women as Problem in Polish Insurgent Discourse”, in Elwira M. Grossman, ed., *Studies in Language, Literature, and Cultural Mythology in Poland: Investigating ‘The Other’* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 55–83; Rudolf Jaworski and Bianka Pietrów-Ennker, *Women in Polish Society* (Boulder: East European

and particularly in the aftermath of the 1863 uprising against the Russian Empire, the *Matka-Polka* was an oft-cited feminine ideal, evoked in everything from novels to sermons to political tracts. This model Polish woman was a strong figure, but a thoroughly domesticated one. She remained at home while her husband and sons went off to fight for Poland, but she nonetheless served the nation by educating the young in a patriotic spirit, and by sustaining home and hearth for the partisan fighters. She was characterised by a limitless ability to endure suffering, as she watched her men sacrifice themselves to the forces of History. And when the men were gone, it fell upon the *Matka-Polka* to keep the nation alive – much as Ziemięcka saw it as women’s task to sustain Catholicism at a time when (she felt) most men had been lost to the onslaught of rationalism. Like the *Matka-Polka*, the Virgin was frequently called upon to save the nation and the faith by modelling proper behaviour for (Polish Catholic) women, and by transmitting feminine virtues to an overly masculine modernity. In nineteenth-century Western Europe we see the emergence of the bourgeois housewife as an ideal; her Polish counterpart was equally domestic but much more entangled in nationalist imagery.

The *Matka-Polka* image and the Marian cult shared an emphasis on suffering and pain, with portraits of grieving mothers echoing *pietas* of an earlier time. More generally, Polish Catholicism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was marked by the conviction that earthly existence was a “vale of tears” which we had to endure until we attained eternal life. At the time, the most popular resource to aid priests in the composition of their Sunday sermons was a periodical called *Biblioteka Kaznodziejska* (The Library of Sermons), founded by Fr Józef Stagraczyński in 1870 and published in both Poznań and Warsaw.²⁶ In 1908 this influential priest released a massive, two-volume collection of exemplary sermons taken from his decades of editorial (and presumably authorial) work, and the overpowering theme was one of gloom and despair about the horrors of our earthly existence. A sermon to be given on 1 January, for example, railed against the custom of celebrating the New Year. Instead of holding parties, the faithful should “think often about death”.

You lie down on your bed for a rest – imagine that it is your deathbed, imagine that slowly your strength is falling away, that your thoughts are growing dim, that your breathing is becoming more and more shallow, until it finally stops. Imagine that you are already lying there as a corpse, without feeling. Imagine that your family, your neighbours, your friends are standing next to you and crying. . . . A few more moments, and you will be lying deep in the earth, which will cover you up, until you eventually turn into dust. Do this often, and it will be good practice for death. Imagining your death in this way will tear you away from an inappropriate attachment to creation; it will be an impetus to the sort of life that you might wish for yourself on your deathbed.²⁷

Monographs, 1992); Tadeusz Łepkowski, *Rozważania o losach polskich* (London: Puls Publications, 1987); D. Markowska, “Rola kobiety polskiej w rodzinie”, in Jadwiga Biedrzycka, ed., *Kobiety Polskie* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1986), 184–224; Joanna Podgórska, “Cień Matki Polki”, *Polityka* 21 (24 May 2003).

²⁶ On the use of such homiletic guidebooks, see Olszewski, *Polska kultura*, 80–91.

²⁷ “Na Nowy Rok: Trzy postanowienia”, in Józef Stagraczyński, *Wybór kazań niedzielnych i świątecznych* (Poznań: Drukarnia i Księgarnia św. Wojciecha, 1908), I, 14–15.

In another model sermon, priests were told to remind their parishioners that “life is not a game . . . Life is, unfortunately, an unbroken chain of misfortune and injustice, but that is precisely why the word of God is essential, in order to guide us along the true path”.²⁸ A generation later this theme still dominated Polish homiletic writing. A collection of sermons published in 1945 stressed that “there has always been suffering on earth, and that will remain the fate of the sons of man all the way to the end of the world”.²⁹ Like Stagraczyński, the editors of this collection tried to instil a fear of damnation into the faithful, and convince them that earth was nothing more than “a huge cemetery” in which “we constantly wander among tombs and graves”.³⁰ The search for diversion and entertainment was intrinsically sinful, because it distracted good Christians from their only hope for genuine joy – in heaven.

We have all experienced illness, disease, nuisances, sadness, worries, disasters, disrespect and persecution, and yet we cannot get rid of the idea that we are here on earth to be successful, to be happy, to have fun. But in fact we suffer, my dear ones, we all suffer, without exception, and even if there are some who are from time to time free from suffering, they cannot be genuinely happy, and into their hearts constantly comes the thought: man, do not consider yourself happy prematurely! . . . The whole life of a Christian is essentially one never-ending cross.³¹

This style of bleak, otherworldly religiosity provided the context for many discussions of Mary. One model sermon for Good Friday explained Mary’s role in the crucifixion: “Sometimes people have a very false idea about the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, thinking that it was a life full of peace and quiet, calm and undisturbed right up to the moment when Jesus was arrested. So it might seem from the surface, but in fact every day, starting with the Annunciation, was like martyrdom”.³² Speaking about the Assumption of Mary, one of Father Stagraczyński’s sermons lamented that “before that day of joy, how much the Most Blessed Virgin had to work, struggle, suffer. Her glory is a *reward*, which she had to earn . . . It’s enough to say that she was poor, poor from birth all the way to her happy dormition, so she was never free from work, and she had constantly to perform the lowliest kind of service.” This last term – service – was most important for Stagraczyński. “As a *pure* and immaculate Virgin, she served the equally pure Joseph. In *humility* she accepted motherhood according to the Word of God. With *faith* she accepted everything according to the will of God. As a *faithful handmaiden* she gave service to the Divine Infant, fed him, nursed him, cared for him”.³³ The lengths to which this modelling could be taken were reflected in another sermon, which claimed that

²⁸ “Na niedzielę Mięsopusztą: Przeszkody słowa Bożego”, in Stagraczyński, *Wybór kazań*, I, 135.

²⁹ “Na uroczystość Bożego Narodzenia: Jasielka”, in *Pokłosie Słowa Bożego: Zbiór Kazań Niedzielných, Świątecznych, Okolicznościowych i Przygodnych* (Milwaukee: Nowinie Polskie, 1945), 15. Although printed in Milwaukee for use in Polish-American parishes, several references within the text suggest that this collection was written in Poland.

³⁰ “Na zakończenie starego roku: Rachunek”, *ibid.*, 31–4.

³¹ “Kazanie pasyjne: Cyrenejczyk pomagający”, *ibid.*, 111, 113.

³² “Kazanie pasyjne: Matka Bolejąca”, *ibid.*, 117.

³³ “Na Wniebowzięcie N. Maryi Panny: Zapłata zasłużona i sprawiedliwa”, in Stagraczyński, *Wybór kazań*, II, 67–73 (emphasis in original).

[Mary's] clothing and household appliances were always clean and orderly, and moreover they were extremely simple. Whatever she had to do, she did on time, never hastily or feverishly, and what she had to do today, she never put off until tomorrow. When she set to work, she focused all her undivided attention on her work, and even then she did not cease to live entirely through God. She was incapable of absentmindedness and never overlooked anything.³⁴

The *Hetmanka* did appear in these sermons, but she was slightly reconfigured so as to fit within this more intimate, and more pessimistic, style of Catholicism.

It is the privilege of a queen to *declare war*. And Mary takes advantage of that privilege. And she is fighting a war. Against whom? Against the devil . . . against our greed, which she helps us fight; against temptation, which she teaches us to resist; against sin, which is her implacable enemy. She is fighting a war. Against whom? Against death, which strangles us; against sickness, which is visited upon us; against pestilence, which plagues us. She is fighting a war. Against whom? Against the infidels, who have no faith; against the heretics, who have lost their faith; against the enemies of God and the Church . . . She fought with Kordecki at Jasna Góra against the Swedish invasion, she fought with Sobieski at Vienna against the Turkish incursion – that invisible knight [*rycerka* – a feminisation along the lines of *Hetmanka*] took part in bloody assaults, in order to bring victory to the side of those who called upon her name, and she scattered the Muslim pagans, breaking them forever.³⁵

Mary still leads the Poles into battles, but the enemy is expanded so that the struggle can be carried out on a more intimate level. When necessary, she has plunged into bloody wars in defense of the nation and the faith; in calmer times, she helps individuals struggle against temptation and sin. These two conflicts were described in parallel terms, as if they were alternative manifestations of the same thing.

We see a similar slide between Mary's work in history and the personal Mary in the sermons of Fr Ireneusz Kmiecik, who gained fame in the inter-war years for his oratory and travelled to parishes all over the country to revitalise the faithful. In a 1930 sermon, he recited the litany of familiar stories: the intervention at Częstochowa; King Jan Kazimierz's pledge of service to her on behalf of the nation; the failure of eighteenth-century Poles to fulfil this pledge; the resulting (appropriate) divine punishment of the partitions; and the "Miracle on the Vistula" in 1920 that marked Poland's return to Mary's graces. This narrative about Mary the *Hetmanka*, however, merely served as a prelude to a discussion of Mary the Exemplar. After finishing his historical story of Mary's protection, Kmiecik told his audience that her patronage of Poland should inspire the faithful to imitate her: "Our obligation as children of Mary is to copy her virtues, examples of which She so wonderfully provided during her life . . . In particular, we must copy her in humility, silence, modesty, and above all in purity and in the love of God and humanity".³⁶ In other words, the Queen of Heaven and of Poland often displayed her power and vengeance, but the Virgin who was to serve as a model for human behaviour was characterised by very different – more properly feminine – qualities. Poles were to honour her for her military victories, but were to follow the example of her humility and purity.

³⁴ "Kazanie majowe—księżyc nocy ducha", in *Pokłosie Słowa Bożego*, 185.

³⁵ "Na Narodzenie N. Maryi Panny: Marya Królowa", in Stagraczyński, *Wybór kazań*, 161.

³⁶ Kmiecik, *Misje Ludowe*, 402–3, 406.

After the Second World War the pessimism and otherworldliness of this homiletic rhetoric was increasingly challenged, but never entirely replaced, by a more optimistic and open interpretation of Catholicism. The new religiosity, which spread gradually in the 1960s and 1970s, was marked by a deeper personal relationship with God and a distrust of religious practices sustained only by tradition or habit. Along with this came a slight decline in Marian devotion, which many educated, urban Poles came to associate with the ritualistic, sentimental practices of rural Catholicism. The magazine *Tygodnik Powszechny*, written by and for this relatively small (but influential) group of “modern” Catholics, rarely even discussed Mary or Marianism, favouring instead a more Christ-centric approach to their faith. No one openly called for an abandonment of Marian worship (key elements of her cult were, after all, set down in dogmatic proclamations that could not be denied by anyone loyal to Rome), but the shift in emphasis was evident to any reader of *Tygodnik Powszechny*. Jerzy Narbutt captured the doubts of this circle when he wrote,

No one would think of belittling the cult of Mary – that would be a theological error. I’m talking about something else: if I use the word “moderation”, I am talking about moderation in the *proportionality* of that cult, of its proper *positioning* in relation to the cult of Christ... “Through Mary to Jesus” – thus the *direction* is Christ-centric. Some of the faithful in the Latin Rite seem to forget about this, emphasising rather the first part of that sentence (“through Mary”) and forgetting about the second, which has had the result that their religiosity is *exclusively* Marian.³⁷

A perusal of Catholic texts from the 1960s and 1970s reveals why Narbutt was concerned about a lack of “proportionality”. At the time the Polish episcopate and most of the clergy were strongly resistant to *Tygodnik Powszechny*’s more “modern” religiosity, and particularly opposed to any weakening of the Marian cult. Because of the rather tight doctrinal boundaries placed around Marianism at the time, and because of the censorship imposed by the state, we do not find much explicit debate about the Virgin in communist Poland. Nonetheless, the intensity of devotion to Mary and the frequency with which her name was evoked in Catholic texts and sermons served as a marker of whether one belonged to the “traditional” or “modern” wing of the Church. But whether the Virgin stood at the centre of one’s faith, or barely registered on the periphery, there seemed to be a general agreement about what she signified and about how she modelled Catholic femininity.

In 1962 Fr Jan Popiel wrote an essay for *Tygodnik Powszechny* in which he urged the readers of that publication to return to the Marianism of their forebears. He recognised that it was necessary to revitalise the old forms of the cult, because otherwise “the Mother of God and Man will become for many people in Poland, particularly for intellectuals and young people, harder to understand, more distant and alien”. This would be a tragedy, he wrote, because “there is no true Catholicism without a sincere Marian cult”. Mary embodied the feminine side of the faith, Popiel believed, and this made her particularly necessary to Catholics of the late twentieth century who were growing ever more rational, ever more distant from the mysticism at the heart of all religious experience. “A woman is by nature more sentimental

³⁷ Jerzy Narbutt, “Katolicy wschodu i zachodu”, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 16, 33 (19 August 1962), 3–4.

than men”, wrote Father Popiel, “and at the same time she engages and bonds more fully with other people. A religious experience of the Mother of God protects the modern Catholic from over-intellectualising, from becoming internally frigid or arid”.³⁸ Just as before the Second World War, the Virgin would provide an example for Catholic women and simultaneously counterbalance the alleged hyper-rationality of men. From the ultramontane Catholicism of Eleonora Ziemięcka in the 1840s to the reform Catholicism of *Tygodnik Powszechny* in the 1960s, this message remained a part of Polish Marianism.

One of the leading voices for renewal in the 1960s was the young bishop Karol Wojtyła, who later became Pope John Paul II. In his sermons, the *Mater Dolorosa* made the transition to the Catholicism of Vatican Council II without losing any of her maternal qualities – in fact, she became the mother of reform. As he put it in 1966,

We see Mary in tears, we see Mary suffering, in maternal pain, we see how in the pain of Calvary our Mother is born for the third time. Looking at all this after the completion of the Second Vatican Council, we see that today’s world is also being born in pain similar to those births. Amidst labour pains, amidst the pains of its maternity, the contemporary Church is being born.³⁹

But even as Wojtyła identified Mary as the mother of the modern world and the ‘Contemporary Church’, he reiterated her role as an exemplar of traditional femininity.⁴⁰ As recently as 1962, Bishop Wojtyła argued that the legal equality of women could be accepted only under certain conditions. He considered women’s emancipation to be “fundamentally justified, as long as it is based on the inner maturity and autonomy of women . . . Without this, the external emancipation of women will be destructive, not constructive”. Legal, occupational or political emancipation, if

³⁸ Jan Popiel, “Kult Maryi a religijność “nowej fali”,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 18 (6 May 1962), 1–2. Bohdan Cywiński echoed this argument in strikingly similar terms later that year in an article entitled “Niepokojący fakt”, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 16, 37 (16 Sept. 1962), 1–2. Cywiński repeats the claim that “Catholicism without Mary is incomplete”, and argues that a focus on the “humanity of Mary” would provide for modern believers a model that would “complete” the one provided by Jesus.

³⁹ Karol Wojtyła, “Narodzenie Matki Bożej (Limanowa, 11 września 1966)”, in *Kazanie*, 116–23. The comment about “three births” refers to Mary’s own birth, the birth into a new life that accompanied her conception of Jesus and the birth of the Church that came with Christ’s death and resurrection.

⁴⁰ At the same time, many in the West were trying to update Mary for a new age in gender relations. These efforts eventually led Paul VI, in a 1974 encyclical, to recognise that “the picture of the Blessed Virgin presented in a certain type of devotional literature cannot easily be reconciled with today’s lifestyle, especially the way women live today . . . The Virgin Mary has always been proposed to the faithful by the Church as an example to be imitated, not precisely in the type of life she led and much less for the socio-cultural background in which she lived and which today scarcely exists anywhere”. A Marianism for the 1970s, continued Paul, would repudiate the image of the “timidly submissive woman” and the “Mother exclusively concerned with her own divine Son”, and replace her with a revolutionary crusader “who did not hesitate to proclaim that God vindicates the humble and the oppressed, and removes the powerful people of this world from their privileged positions”. Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, paras. 34–37. The text of this encyclical can be found at <http://www.newadvent.org/library/docs.pa06mc.htm> (accessed 11 Aug. 2004). Alongside efforts to modernise Mary, one can also find sometimes harsh Catholic feminist critiques of Marianism. See Maurice Hamington, *Hail Mary? The Struggle for Ultimate Womanhood in Catholicism* (New York: Routledge, 1995); and Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976).

introduced without a proper foundation, would “tear apart a woman” because it would “double her tasks, duties, and challenges in life”. Wojtyła was not criticising the injustice of the double burden faced by working women; rather, he was pointing out that such an outcome was a necessary consequence of emancipation, because he believed women to be naturally and inevitably drawn to motherhood. Women must not, he said, try to escape this social role, or to deny the “specific inner structure” that made each of them “a person of the heart, a person of intuition”. The reference to maternity provided the point of entry for Mary.

Now we come to the deepest function of every woman, namely: motherhood. Mother – that means she who gives birth; and to give birth, that means to educate. She educates from intuition, she educates from the heart. Those are great means for education. She educates children, and not only children, she educates man above all. That is a fundamental task. She educates man. It is not without meaning that Christ, the son of God – God, a man – gave himself for education to a woman-Mother.

This inspired Wojtyła to assume the voice of a woman: “it is necessary to train [man] to understand that I am a person. It is necessary to train him to understand that I can be a mother. And it is necessary to train him to understand that motherhood is greatness”. Once again the parallel with Ziemięcka is striking: Wojtyła attributed to women the status of “person” (something that he apparently felt still needed to be said, even in 1962) and he claimed that he was affirming gendered differences without implying that women were inferior. He even called upon men to show greater respect for the maternal duties of their wives (without going so far as to suggest that men assume some domestic tasks themselves). But ultimately he concluded that because of each woman’s distinct “psyche” and her maternal duties “she needs support, greater maturity and inner autonomy” before she could manage the extraordinary demands of emancipation.⁴¹ Writing many years later, this time as Pope John Paul II, he still described the Marian example in terms of “sentiment”, “sorrow”, “devotion”, “intuition” and “encouragement”.

Women, by looking to Mary, find in her the secret of living their femininity with dignity and of achieving their own true advancement. In the light of Mary, the Church sees in the face of women the reflection of a beauty which mirrors the loftiest sentiments of which the human heart is capable: the self-offering totality of love; the strength that is capable of bearing the greatest sorrows; limitless fidelity and tireless devotion to work; the ability to combine penetrating intuition with words of support and encouragement.⁴²

Very few in the Polish Church have challenged these basic assumptions about the Marian exemplar, or about the proper role for Catholic women.⁴³ What has

⁴¹ Karol Wojtyła, “Do młodzieży akademickiej (Kraków, kościół Św. Anny, 9–14 kwietnia 1962)”, in *Kazanie*, 187–8. His audience for this particular presentation was made up entirely of young women.

⁴² John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, para. 46. For the text of this encyclical, see http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0224/_INDEX.HTM (accessed 11 Aug. 2004).

⁴³ In fairness, *Tygodnik Powszechny* did publish an article in 1961 calling for men and women to balance domestic chores and to rethink some traditional notions of femininity, but this unleashed a polemical storm that lasted for months. I have found no examples of this argument penetrating any conversations about Mary in Poland. See Ks. Stanisław Klucz, “Wychowanie mężczyzny”, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 15, 6

distinguished reformists from more conservative members of the clergy has been the way in which the latter have placed the Virgin within a *national* framework, thus linking the personal and political within a vision of national femininity, within the framework of the *Matka-Polka*. On 26 August 1956, with Primate Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński still imprisoned by the communist authorities and Władysław Gomułka's rise to power two months in the future, thousands of the faithful gathered in Częstochowa to commemorate the 300th anniversary of King Jan Kazimierz's oath of allegiance to Mary. Wyszyński himself had composed the text of a new oath, which he hoped would update the pledge of 1656 for a new era. He would later urge the faithful to recite this new pledge often, and even today it serves as the centrepiece for many Częstochowa pilgrimages.⁴⁴ Addressing the "Queen of the World and the Queen of Poland", the pledge affirms a commitment to the "lofty mission of the Nation, cleansed in the waters of Holy Baptism", and expresses "a sense of guilt that up to now we have not carried out the oaths and pledges of our Fathers". Remembering the commitment of King Jan Kazimierz, the faithful promise to "renew today the pledges of our ancestors and recognise You as our Patron and as the Queen of the Polish nation". The new oath urged Catholics "to do everything in our power to ensure that Poland will truly be Your and Your Son's Kingdom, entirely subordinate to Your rule in our personal, family, national, and social life". More specifically, Wyszyński's pledge promised to oppose abortion and divorce, to "stand on guard before the domestic hearth", to defend children "against godlessness and corruption", and to struggle against hatred, injustice, violence, exploitation, hunger, homelessness, laziness, waste and drunkenness.⁴⁵ The nation, in this and similar texts, moved back and forth from the stage of geopolitics to the more intimate spaces of "the domestic hearth". The political and moral spheres overlapped in the writings

(1961); Wanda Póltawska, "Męskie "wychowanie mężczyzny"," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 15, 8 (1961), 3; Ks. Stanisław Klucz, "Szkola żon", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 15, 11 (1961), 1; Natalia Seńska, "Między smażeniem kotletów a praniem", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 15, 11 (1961), 1; Bogna Grabowska, "Nie chcemy wychowywać panów i władców", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 15, 11 (1961), 1–2; Wanda Póltawska, "Kobiety", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 15, 13 (1961), 4–5; Stefan Wysocki, "Mężczyźni i kwiaty", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 15, 16 (1961), 5.

⁴⁴ For an example of Wyszyński's fondness for this pledge, see the pastoral letter for Ash Wednesday, 1957, "Wielkopostne przygotowanie do przyrzeczeń jasnogórskich (Gniezno-Warszawa, w Popielec 1957 r.)", in Wyszyński, *Listy pasterskie*, 275–7. For an example of its use in the twenty-first century, see "Ponad 200 tys. uczestników pielgrzymki Rodziny Radia Maryja na Jasną Górę", *Gazeta Wyborcza* (14 July 2003). Less well known than Wyszyński's pledge was an earlier attempt to renew Jan Kazimierz's vows, from 1936. On that occasion a group of right-wing students gathered in Częstochowa to promise the Virgin that they would work to build a "Catholic Poland". See *Ślubujemy: Echa pielgrzymki akademickiej na Jasną Górę, 24 Maja 1936* (Toruń: Instytut Wydawnictw Różańcowych, 1936).

⁴⁵ The text of the "Pledge of Jasna Góra" can be found in *Listy pasterskie Episkopatu Polski, 1945–1974* (Paris: Éditions du Dialogue, 1975), 166–168. It can also be found online at http://www.jasnagora.pl/polski/jasnogorskie_sluby_19560826.html (accessed 11 Aug. 2004). Later the episcopate issued a pastoral letter in which they affirmed their belief that Mary was responsible for Cardinal Wyszyński's release and that her intervention was a response to the Pledge. "W latach wdzięczności wobec Matki Bożej Jasnogórskiej (Warszawa, dnia 18 listopada 1976 r.)", in *Listy pasterskie Prymasa Polski oraz Episkopatu 1975–1981*, 273–6.

of the Polish episcopate and clergy during the communist era. Indeed, it is precisely this linkage that gave Polish Marianism its power: by working so smoothly on two different registers, Marianism provided a vocabulary for Polish Catholics to conflate the political struggle against communism and the moral struggle against what they perceived to be the decadence of modern life. The idea of “struggle” fused political or national Marianism with the personal devotion that held up Mary as a model for individual behaviour. As a result, instead of discussing moral concerns in terms of individual salvation, the dominant mode for dealing with such questions was militaristic: the battle against immorality was akin to earlier battles against a variety of other challenges to the faith and the nation. Once moral injunctions were located within this framework, Mary the *Hetmanka* could be linked to Mary the Exemplar.

In a ceremony held for the archdiocese of Gniezno on 5 September 1965, and for the archdiocese of Warsaw three days later, Cardinal Wyszyński submitted these two ecclesiastical provinces “into maternal slavery to the Mother of God, for the sake of the freedom of the Holy Church”.⁴⁶ A year later, the entire episcopate followed this move, and the pledge was repeated in every parish on 3 May 1966.

We place ourselves in the unailing hands of the Most Holy Mary, whose protection and aid we have experienced throughout history . . . Today, with a trusting heart, we surrender all the children of God from this baptised Nation, and everything that Poland stands for, into Your eternal, maternal slavery of love, for the sake of the freedom of the Church in the world and in our Fatherland, so that the Kingdom of God on earth will be spread . . . From this moment, our most wonderful Mother and Queen of Poland, consider us Poles, as a Nation, to be entirely your property, to be a tool in your hands on behalf of the holy Church, to which we are indebted for the light of faith, the strength of the cross, spiritual unity and the peace of God. Do with us as you wish.⁴⁷

Cardinal Wyszyński explained this extraordinary act as an attempt to use one form of slavery – to the Holy Mother – as a means of gaining her protection against a much more dangerous form of slavery – to an unnamed foe. The anonymous enemies here were obviously the communist regime and the USSR – that hardly needed to be stated – but there was more to Wyszyński’s pledge than anti-communism. In another letter, the bishops indicated that the battle was no longer primarily geopolitical, but personal: “We will cry out to Mary, our Mother and the Mother of the Church, “Appear before us, Mother!” help us in the struggle with our national failings. Give us victory over ourselves”.⁴⁸ In this war with our own weaker nature, Mary was just as relevant as she had been in the struggles against the Swedes, the Ottomans or the Russians. In fact, those epic historical battles could be cast as mere reflections of the fundamental struggle against the “slavery of sin”. As the bishops reminded the faithful in a pastoral letter of 1968, “a decline in morality was once among the causes of the

⁴⁶ Wyszyński’s “Akt oddania archidiecezji Gnieźnieńskiej (Gniezn, dnia 5 września 1965 r.)”, and “Oddanie archidiecezji warszawskiej w macierzyńską niewolę Bogurodzicy za wolność kościoła świętego (Warszawa dnia 8 września 1965 r.)”, in Wyszyński, *Listy pasterskie*, 488–92.

⁴⁷ “Akt oddania Polski w macierzyńską niewolę Maryi Matki Kościoła za wolność Kościoła Chrystusowego (Jasna Góra, dnia 3 maja 1966 roku, w uroczystość Królowej Polski)”, in *Listy pasterskie Episkopatu, 1945–1974*, 442–3.

⁴⁸ “List pasterski Episkopatu Polski do duchowieństwa i wiernych o zwycięstwie nad sobą na rzecz soboru (Jasna Góra, dnia 4 września 1964 r.)”, *ibid.*, 360–1.

loss of political freedom”.⁴⁹ The story of Częstochowa was still relevant, because it was just as imperative to call upon Mary’s help today as it was then.

You might say, “but, after all, no “deluge” is pouring in on us today”. Yet what is the collapse of the family and the conspiracy against unborn life, the plague of alcoholism and demoralisation? What is our addiction to luxury and our social discord? Is all that not a “deluge” a hundred times more dangerous than the one from Sweden was? . . . The secularised style of life, the secular family, education and schooling, secular art and culture, press, books, film and television – everything is already secular! It all points to a vision of a Nation without a soul, without ideas, without strength, without moral restraints – in other words, without a future.⁵⁰

The reference to a “conspiracy” in this passage exemplifies the delicate balance between the focus on individual sin and the tendency to seek an enemy outside the nation itself – a foreign foe against whom the power of Mary’s intervention could be directed. A prayer written by the episcopate in 1977, and recited in every parish in Poland, turned Mary the Exemplar back into Mary the *Hetmanka* by blaming the supposed moral decline of the youth on

a secret plan for the moral destruction of our Nation. That perverse plan, which utilises the schools and various forms of propaganda, has as its objective the uprooting of healthy moral principles in the entire young generation of Poles. Mary of Jasna Góra, just as we did six hundred years ago, so now we look to You for aid. Help us defend ourselves, the youth and the entire Nation against demoralisation. Help us vanquish sin.⁵¹

Was Mary being asked to “vanquish sin” within the individual, or to defeat those who had hatched that “secret plan”? Most likely, both. This indeterminacy was in part related to the reluctance of the bishops to attack the communist regime more explicitly, but, in any case, Marianism provided the framework for an argument that could move effortlessly between moral injunctions and political struggle.

In the work of the contemporary Catholic publicist and theologian, Fr Czesław Bartnik, Mary similarly provides the link between the grand sweep of History and the personal realm of individual morality. Just as Mary literally embodies God (in the sense of giving Him a human body), so does she show us how the nation can make manifest the divine in its social life. And if we combine this with “the whole theology of the Mother of Divine Suffering”, we can find “the religious key to uncovering the sense of our history”. Marianism, for Fr Bartnik, is ‘always joined tightly with the Polish desire for sovereignty, freedom, and emancipation’, because the Virgin ‘suffers together with the nation, she accompanies its history of crucifixion, she introduces to it a “hidden life” and prepares it for the resurrection’. Significantly, Fr Bartnik specifies that Mary’s miraculous guidance ‘is not a direct, political activity [*działanie*], but rather

⁴⁹ “List Episkopatu Polski do duchowieństwa i wiernych na uroczystość 3 maja na Jasnej Górze i we wszystkich świątyniach (Warszawa, dnia 20 marca 1968 r.)”, *ibid.*, 515–16.

⁵⁰ “Wezwanie Episkopatu Polski do Narodu w obronie życia religijnego (Warszawa, dnia 21 marca 1973 r.)”, *ibid.*, 736–7. The term “Deluge” is used to refer to the disastrous wars that nearly destroyed Poland in the seventeenth century.

⁵¹ “Modlitwa maryjna na dzień jasnogórski”, in *Listy pasterskie Prymasa Polski oraz Episkopatu 1975–1981*, 312. See also the similar appeal in “Sześć wieków królowania Maryi w Polsce poprzez jasnogórski wizerunek (Warszawa, dnia 19 lutego 1976)”, *ibid.*, 247.

a spiritual and indirect activity. It is, specifically, an acting upon [*oddziaływanie na*] the nation's individuality, its thoughts, its heart and its conscience, and only this results in the desired actions and national transformations.' These transformations would, above all, salvage Polish society's respect for maternity, which in turn would provide a balance for the supposed hyper-masculinity of the modern world.⁵² By "acting upon" the individual so as to cultivate Catholic femininity, Mary would strengthen and revitalise the nation. The bishops, writing in 1971, were more explicit about the way in which Mary could 'act upon' humans so as to so as to preserve traditional maternal ideals and (as a result) save the world from its excessive, violent masculinity.

The modern world needs mothers. Humanity today longs for mothers more than ever. In the era of technical 'miracles', cosmic voyages, and trips to the moon, a miracle of the heart is needed. Steel machines are not enough for living people; the living have had enough of clenched fists, hatred and war, and they long for a maternal heart, for love, for gentle kindness and mutual respect. . . . When the values of the feminine spirit are lacking in the family, in the nation, in the world, 'humanity' becomes 'inhuman' . . . The danger of the de-naturalisation of woman is arising . . . *Therefore, it is necessary today to return the dignity of the mother and motherhood.* Women everywhere, in every aspect of life – in the family, in professional, social and public work – should act in a manner appropriate to themselves, *in a maternal manner [po macierzyńsku]*. We need to give mothers back to the children, who have a right to existence, to a home, to love. We need to restore to the Nation, to the Church, to the human family the recognition that they have a mother. Perhaps then this inhuman world of steel will be transformed into a truly humane world, governed by love, not threats and fear.⁵³

The metaphor of "steel" was repeated often in pastoral letters by the episcopate, as a symbol not merely of technology, but of a whole range of modern sins. Cardinal Wyszyński complained about "the one-sidedness of the development of humanity, a humanity of strong men, wills of steel, sober minds, robots without hearts, sensitivity, or feeling. In that one-sided development, marked by an extraordinary intensity of material might, muscular and ruthless will, there is such a great lack of warmth that humanity is reflexively seeking salvation and is longing for a greater balance between the masculine and feminine elements, in accordance with the plan of God". Like Ziemięcka in the mid-nineteenth century, and so many other Catholic authors since that time, Wyszyński believed that society should turn to the "feminine element" to save itself: "As if by reflex, as if by a defensive instinct of self-preservation, the contemporary development of the world is bringing more and more women into social, professional, educational and public life", not in the name of women's emancipation, but in order to restrain the brutality of masculine modernity. What the world needed today, Wyszyński concluded, was "an understanding heart, a delicate will, a truly maternal embrace for the frightened children of God. The world needs today more sensitive hearts than hard steel".⁵⁴

⁵² Czesław Stanisław Bartnik, *Idea Polskości* (Radom: Polskie Wydawnictwo Encyklopedyczne, 2001), 239.

⁵³ "Biskupi polscy ogłaszają w Polsce Święto Maryi Matki Kościoła (Jasna Góra, dnia 4 maja 1971 r.)", in *Listy pasterskie Episkopatu, 1945–1974*, 647–51 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁴ Wyszyński, "Oddanie archidiecezji gnieźnieńskiej w macierzyńską niewolę Bogurodzicy za wolność Kościoła Świętego", in *Listy pasterskie Prymasa Polski oraz Episkopatu 1975–1981*, 484–6.

The ambiguities and tensions within Mary's model of femininity are seen in Catholic writings from many contexts. The Poles cited here were certainly not unique in casting her compassion, humility and faith as alternatives to the modern world's presumed brutality, egoism and scepticism. In modern Poland, however, these themes intersect with patriotic historical narratives to create a particularly intense imagery of *national* femininity, of the *Matka-Polka* merged with the Queen of Poland. Whether focused on the militant Mary who vanquishes Poland's foes and protects her chosen people, or the more nurturing Virgin Mother who provides an example for personal behaviour and an intercessor for intimate problems, Marian worship is almost invariably perceived in Poland as a national devotion. She remains the mighty *Hetmanka*, even as she is deployed to encourage traditional forms of femininity. Challenges to those norms become attacks on the nation, and Mary is once again called upon to save Poland from its foes, be they Swedes, Turks, Russians or the temptations of modernity.