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BOOK REPORT

WOJTYŁA DENOUNCED by Marek Lasota

Basic facts

This book was published in Polish in March 2005 by Krakow-based Znak, a publishing house with a long Catholic tradition. For the first time ever, it exposes the content of top-secret documents from Polish security service files detailing spying operations and subversion strategies focused on Karol Wojtyła throughout the communist era. The revelatory material shows how he was the target of secret agents from his first clerical post just after the war, as a parish priest in a major industrial district, then as a bishop in the Krakow diocese, later as Archbishop of Krakow and, from 1979, as Pope. As his significance grew, so did the operations aimed at infiltrating his immediate circle and influencing his decisions. The extent and scale of these activities has come as a shocking discovery in Poland, and through this book can now be disclosed to the entire world.

The author works in the Public Education Office of the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), where he heads a unit in charge of publicising information on recent Polish history, including facts kept hidden in the communist era. This book is a summary of his research into the Polish secret service files on Karol Wojtyła. It uses direct quotations from secret service documents to illustrate the story, taken from the reports of informers who were working from inside the Church, and from the strategies and orders devised to direct them. As well as demonstrating the increasing level of secret service interest in Wojtyła throughout the communist era, the book also shows how the Polish church

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survived the efforts of the secret police to undermine and finally destroy it, thanks to the diplomacy and political skills of Wojtyła and others, and how much he contributed to the downfall of communism throughout eastern Europe.

Perhaps the most revealing aspect of the secret service documents is the aims of the intelligence forces with regard to the Church at various stages of Polish post-war history as it vied with the Church for the minds and hearts of the Polish people, the methods it employed to reach those aims, the massive scale of its operations, and its ultimate failure to achieve its purposes. Almost from the start the communists were incapable of understanding what the Church meant to the general public, and in retrospect seem doomed to their inevitable downfall. The Church, meanwhile, carried on as normal, confident of its mission and remarkably steadfast in the face of cruel repression. Particularly fascinating is the degree and level of infiltration of the Church by collaborators recruited to spy and cause collapse from within. It is hard to credit how much treachery and hypocrisy contributed to secret service activities, and how close to Wojtyła these hidden enemies were.

Finally, although it has recently become proven public knowledge that the KGB instigated the plot to kill the Pope, this book reveals new information on how the operation was planned and run, and the shocking fact that Moscow ordered the assassination as soon as Karol Wojtyła became Pope, an event that caught the entire communist empire off guard, despite decades of spying by a small army of agents.

The book has been an instant bestseller in Poland, where it appeared shortly before the anniversary of the Pope's death. It has also attracted the interest of an independent Polish television channel, which plans to make a documentary film based on the book, and is also considering a feature film about this aspect of Karol Wojtyła's life.

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Summary of contents

The book is divided into ten chapters, with a foreword, an epilogue and an afterword, two short annexes listing the names of official secret service functionaries, and an index. The Polish edition has photographs that supplement the text, including pictures of Wojtyła in action at various stages of his career, in the company of some of the other people who feature in the text, and among the very large crowds that the Church continued to attract in the communist era. There are also reproductions of original secret service documents, which emphasise the grim reality of the situation and have never been published in this form before. The book is attractively designed, with typewriter print as the font for quotes from the secret documents to stress authenticity. Its thoughtful layout complements the content well, and enhances the exceptional nature of the book.

I am convinced that in a foreign edition the afterword, by historian Ryszard Terlecki, should come at the start, because it provides summary information that may be less familiar to a foreigner than to a Polish reader and is the perfect introduction.

So, to begin at the end, the **afterword** summarises Wojtyła's career and secret service interest in him, starting by saying that his appointment as Pope in October 1978 came as a total shock that caused "an earthquake throughout eastern Europe". The communist authorities immediately began plotting his death, but in Poland they had to accept that with a Pole as Pope, the Church was inevitably a permanent presence that would remain an obstacle to the unlimited control of their regime. While in the late 1940s the Stalinist version of communism had aimed to annihilate the Church entirely, by the 1960s the communists had come to a milder attitude, aiming to eliminate its influence in society but to tolerate its existence. In 1966, the Millennium of Christianity in Poland gave the Church the opportunity to strengthen its public position, which it achieved, despite the efforts of the regime, via the secret service, to limit its public reach. In the 1970s the authorities resolved

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to use the Church to mitigate political tensions, while still trying to undermine it by sowing discord among the clergy and provoking anti-Church prejudice among the public. As Wojtyła's career rapidly developed, secret service interest in him increased, until in his role as Archbishop of Kraków and as a cardinal he was monitored round the clock by a network of secret agents that infiltrated the Church. Once he became a cardinal, he also began to interest the authorities in Moscow, and once he was Pope the secret services of almost all the Soviet satellites were involved in operations to gain information on Vatican intentions towards the Soviet bloc, and to influence the Pope's attitudes.

Although some secret service archive material has been destroyed, there is a large amount left that reveals what was happening at every stage. In 2001 the IPN took charge of the archives of the communist regime and began the huge task of sifting through all the material that been kept from the public. The task is ongoing, with the names of secret agents inevitably destined to emerge as it continues. (Under present Polish legal conditions, such names cannot be published until they have appeared in a full academic analysis of the secret service documents. However, a foreign edition may have greater licence to add the names.) Because of their sheer volume, Marek Lasota had to be selective in his use of archive material for this book and to set limits for his research, though the Pope's death in March 2005 made it expedient to produce the book as testimony to an important aspect of his life that had been kept completely hidden from the public. This book is intended as a popular, accessible work, revealing to the light of day facts that need to be aired as soon as possible, and will no doubt be followed by a more detailed, academic version. The afterword concludes by saying that under new legal provisions more archive material will soon be publicly available, and that Polish public opinion will have to face up to the facts about the recent past. "Marek Lasota's book is another step on the path towards knowing the bitter truth, without which our history will remain an open space full of groundless suspicions,

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illusory merits, false testimony, and also unatoned-for, unforgiven guilt.” For a Polish audience, this book is part of a very sensitive, ongoing process.

The book proceeds chronologically. **Chapter One** tells how secret service interest in Wojtyła began in 1945, when (after forced labour in a factory during the war) he was a young theology student suspected of links to the underground, though no proper evidence was found against him. In this era Wojtyła was close to Archbishop Sapieha, who appears to have protected him from secret police interest by sending him to study in Rome. This took him away from immediate police observation for several years. This was the era of Church repression, including a police attack on a crowd attending mass on independent Poland’s traditional Constitution Day, 3 May 1946. Any manifestations of patriotic feelings for pre-war, free Poland, such as public celebration of Constitution Day, were illegal, and attempts to hold them were suppressed. The secret services were especially concerned about attitudes among students and young people. Meanwhile Sapieha, whom the Pope had made a cardinal, understood the importance of building up an educated and active clergy. Just as he had encouraged them to oppose the Nazis, now the underlying aim was to provide a lasting counterweight to the communists. During his studies in Rome, Karol Wojtyła (who as a factory worker during the war was aware of social issues affecting working people) assisted parishes inhabited by poor workers, and learned modern attitudes about the role of the Church in social life from French and Belgian colleagues. He returned to Poland in 1948, after gaining a PhD.

Meanwhile the secret service was putting a lot of effort into the fight against religion, categorising priests as hostile, neutral or positive, and introducing secret agents within the Church. Here we learn about the departmental structure and aims of the relevant apparatus, which over the decades underwent various reorganisations and changes of attitude, but involved a large staff at every stage. By the 1950s the main aim was to curtail Church influence on society, both through repression and infiltration, and by persuading priests to

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be loyal to the regime. The author outlines how potential agents were identified, recruited, and then handled, and how they operated.

Chapter Two focuses on the era when Karol Wojtyła was a curate in a parish outside Krakow, where he organised youth activities before moving to an inner Krakow parish. A lot of secret police information was provided by a secret agent with the pseudonym “Żagielowski”, who was clearly well placed within the Krakow church. His example illustrates how inside agents were used to gain information that was used to devise strategies aimed at undermining the church from within, such as by exploiting existing points of contention between priests to create antagonisms and divisions. Wojtyła’s activities with young people were a particular point of interest.

The author describes the role of Archbishop Sapieha and how diplomatically he handled the authorities, managing to convey his moral message to the public despite communist efforts to silence the Church. Meanwhile, they treated the primate of Poland, Stefan Wyszyński, as an enemy, and he was the target of repression including imprisonment. During a wave of arrests of priests in late 1952, once again Wojtyła was strategically moved out of harm’s way by his superiors, who at this point gave him the opportunity to continue his academic studies with a post-doctoral thesis.

Chapter Three elaborates on the kind of person recruited to be a secret agent and how they were persuaded; in the 1950s blackmail was no longer used, but agents had to cooperate voluntarily, in the belief that they were acting for the good of the nation. The secret service documents report on Wojtyła’s early promotion to the rank of bishop, and assumes that his special skills among the workers contributed to the appointment. The agent, “Żagielowski”, betrays envy in the tone of his reports, and is also inclined to tell lies in them, of which, as other documents prove, his handlers were aware. The author suggests that his attempts to discredit other priests were motivated by a wish to justify his own activities. Once Wojtyła was a bishop, he became the subject of an entire secret service operation to

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monitor his social and educational activities and his influence on young people and intellectuals, which they saw as politically motivated. The secret police were gradually becoming aware of Wojtyła's capabilities: "he longer appeared to be a theoretician and philosopher divorced from reality, but a dynamic pastor and ethicist capable of polemical debate with Marxism". Priests were individually monitored, with detailed files of information gathered on each one. The text lists the facts that were collected about them, covering every aspect of their daily life. The information was used to devise strategies, exploiting rivalries and disagreements between priests to create rifts and making use of any dissatisfaction to persuade a vulnerable individual to become a collaborator.

Chapter Four describes how Wojtyła was under round-the-clock observation, using secret agents and bugging technology to monitor all his contacts, especially with foreigners. A whole arsenal of methods and a large number of people were employed to spy on him, with the ultimate aim of devising ways of steering his decisions to the state's own benefit. However, Wojtyła was clearly not a pushover, but a highly skilled diplomat, who often reached compromises with the state authorities over delicate issues, gaining more ground than they were aware of giving. In 1963 he was nominated as a candidate for the post of Archbishop of Krakow. Here the author speculates on the reasons why the authorities – who had the right to approve or reject candidates – at first rejected, and then accepted Wojtyła's name. The real reasons are not entirely clear, but the authorities may have regarded Wojtyła as having the potential to act as counterweight to their prime enemy, Cardinal Wyszyński, and as someone they would find it easier to cooperate with if he eventually became primate. The author offers various hypotheses. In any case, despite their efforts to monitor him, the communist authorities failed at this critical moment to see that Wojtyła would prove a very dangerous opponent.

Chapter Five deals with Church-state rivalries over the workers of Nowa Huta, the huge steelworks established by the communists near Krakow as a symbolic modern,

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industrial contrast to the ancient, university city that is the traditional heart of Poland. The Church made sure of holding a ceremony to bless the steelworks when it opened, followed by a big effort to build a parish church for the workers in the neighbourhood. Wojtyła's skills in dealing with social issues and his ability to communicate with the workers made him a key figure. The authorities first agreed, and then refused to let a church be built, and when their attempts to pull down a cross at the site of the future church provoked thousands of people to defend it, followed by police action to break up the crowd, they accused the Church of having staged a riot. Amid much bad blood, Wojtyła managed to convince the authorities that, having once said they would, they must build the church to prove they cared about the people's spiritual needs and weren't going to let them down. (Evidently, he was far more able to influence their decisions than the other way around, without the need for any spying operations.) Once again he reached a compromise, and achieved the Church's aim, while also giving the impression of being an easier character to deal with than Wyszyński. Efforts to build a second church in the 1970s were also contentious, but Wojtyła finally achieved this goal as well. His ability to address the workers' concerns was demonstrated forcefully in 1979, when on his first pilgrimage to Poland as Pope the authorities refused to allow him to visit Nowa Huta.

Chapter Six describes how the Church prepared to celebrate the Millennium of Christianity in Poland in 1966, and how the secret service made various efforts to discredit the Church in the context of the anniversary. They tried to minimise its symbolic importance for the Polish national identity by limiting public participation and disrupting the smooth flow of events. However, the Millennium was an occasion for a re-evaluation of the role of the Church in modern Poland, inspiring much debate on the future role of Christian faith in comparison with Marxism. Here the author discusses attitudes within the Polish Church to its own future and what strategy was best for its survival within the communist state, a subject of much discussion between Wojtyła and Wyszyński. The chapter concludes with

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information from police reports recording the failure of efforts to compromise Wojtyła by seeking proof of his intimate relationship with a woman.

Chapter Seven elaborates on Millennium events and the enormous effort that went into counteracting their impact. In particular the authorities tried to interfere with a procession carrying a copy of Poland's holiest icon, the Black Madonna of Częstochowa, from its home city to Krakow through a number of parishes, by delaying it and deliberately changing the route mid-way. Huge crowds came out in spite of heavy rain, and were disappointed when the icon was by-passed, but the secret service's hope of provoking riots that could be blamed on the Church were thwarted in advance by Wojtyła's call for calm. A huge operation was mounted in Krakow to monitor every aspect of the celebrations and any manifestations of opposition within them. When a large crowd accompanied the icon back to the city gates on its return journey, and then went back into the city singing hymns, the riot police were sent in to break them up on the grounds that they were "hooligans" who had shouted "Down with the communists!". Several people were arrested but no charges were brought, and they were released within 10-20 days. No proof was ever found that anyone had instigated the crowd to express opposition to the state, and the whole incident was apparently pure provocation.

Chapter Eight tells how Wojtyła's appointment as a cardinal came as a surprise to the communist authorities. The secret service documents discuss possible reasons why the Vatican took this action. Convinced on the basis of secret agents' reports that there was a rift between Wojtyła and Wyszyński, in line with their general policy of causing divisions between the primate and his bishops, they saw Wojtyła's promotion to cardinal as an opportunity to further undermine Wyszyński by exploiting his sense of threat from a younger rival. They also saw the choice of such a diplomatic intellectual as cardinal as a Vatican effort to improve relations between the Church and state in Poland, where Wyszyński's relations with the state had always been bad, and where they assumed Wojtyła

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would succeed him as primate. In this period the secret service focused on causing a clash between the two clerics, playing on the differences in their attitudes to the role of the Church in Poland and its future strategy, but actually lacked any real ideas of how to do this. The author implies that not only was there no real conflict between them, but that they knew exactly how the authorities were trying to play them off against each other.

The chapter concludes with the case of an inside agent who monitored and informed on a priest who was trying to help some Czech citizens to escape to the USA; because of the informer they were all caught and the priest went to prison. The author then gives a detailed biography of another powerful agent who, as a military magistrate earlier on, had condemned dozens of people to death. A chequered career had led to him becoming a “cell agent” while in prison for corruption – in exchange for information gleaned from his cellmates he was released early. This same agent later monitored the Krakow clergy from the inside, and ultimately John Paul II and other Polish priests within the Vatican. Here is an instance where, despite giving a detailed biography of the agent, the author does not mention his real name.

Chapter Nine continues to describe secret service strategy towards the Church, involving efforts to undermine it by setting differing trends against each other, and by influencing the attitudes of clerics to the state. The author often mentions “disintegration” – the policy of destroying Church integrity and cohesion from the inside. He gives a long list of items of information about Wojtyła that the secret agents were detailed to gather, including his psychological characteristics, attitudes to social and political issues as well as to Church internal affairs, his contacts with the clergy, and lots of extremely trivial facts about his personal life, such as his daily habits (right down to who supplied his underwear), his access to the media, state of health, hobbies, what technology he owned, sporting activities and travel, friends and family. Once he was a cardinal, every last step he took and every word he said were reported. Of special interest were his meetings, particularly with foreign

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diplomats and Vatican officials. The documents analyse his doings and saying in an attempt to devise further strategies for counteracting the Church and diminish its involvement with the public, especially young people and their education. Meanwhile the Church was carrying on its mission, subtly retaining and strengthening its influence on society.

As Wojtyła's importance to the Pope as a person with influence in the eastern bloc became more apparent, the authorities grew alarmed. "However," writes Lasota, "in the mid-1970s the over-confidence of Edward Gierek's team was too great for it to be able to concern itself with more serious ultimate scenarios for the Krakow Archbishop's career." Though gradually perceiving that he could be a dangerous opponent, and to this end attempting through their agents to provoke clashes between him and his main advisors, the communists were failing to neutralise the effects of Wojtyła's activities in defence of human rights and in education. Their own reports are proof of his successes. The chapter concludes with the huge shock they suffered when he was made Pope, which came as a complete surprise. Apparently Stanisław Kania, a secretary to the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party called Premier Gierek with the news, and heard in reply a classic Polish oath, literally "By the wounds of God!" A stunned gathering of communist top brass consoled themselves with the idea that Wojtyła would be less of a problem to them as Pope than as primate of Poland.

Chapter Ten covers secret service operations during John Paul II's historic first pilgrimage to Poland in 1979. While aware of the huge significance of a Polish Pope to the nation, the authorities knew they had to pretend to be pleased and had no way of preventing the visit. However, they were ready to exploit its potential to provoke conflict within the Church, and also to minimise its impact on the Polish public by limiting audience numbers. Furious that they would have no control over the Pope's speeches, they tried to impose obstacles by controlling the timing and route of his visit, restricting meetings with the young, and refusing him permission to go to Nowa Huta. Moscow was on the alert. "When the

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committee of representatives of the Church and the authorities was conducting stormy negotiations and spending hours working out the details of such an unusual event in the history of a communist state, concerns and irritation were growing in the Kremlin. About a fortnight before John Paul II's arrival, Brezhnev tried to persuade Gierek: "The Pope's a clever chap, so you tell him to make a public announcement that he can't come because he's ill." But stopping the machinery once it had been set in motion was no longer possible. All that was left was the security service apparatus, which had to limit the harmful effects of the pilgrimage on the Polish People's Republic as much as possible." The helplessness of the Polish security services is grimly illustrated by the response to the Pope's visit of the Foreign Minister General Kiszczak, who said, "We can only hope God calls him to his side quickly".

A massive operation was then mobilised, covering every aspect of the visit, which would be key to future Church-state relations. Detailed strategies were issued, designed to shape and influence the proceedings, with orders to monitor the clergy, foreign diplomats and journalists, dissidents and "anti-social elements", students, human rights activists, the London Polonia, political fanatics and even lunatics. Work places were infiltrated to monitor the mood among workers, and efforts made to prevent potential demonstrations. Observation posts were set up all over Krakow, and inside agents were assigned a long list of tasks, such as using the visit to discover Vatican policy towards Poland and to influence Papal decisions. However, the planning documents do not mention any provisions for the Pope's security. Thinking they had dampened the effect of the visit by forcing it to move from the symbolic 900th anniversary of the martyrdom of Polish patron St Stanislaw to the Descent of the Holy Spirit, the authorities failed to be ready for the impact of the Pope's words, broadcast from Warsaw's Victory Square to the entire world: "Let Your Spirit descend, and renew the face of this land. This land!" No one was yet aware that the Pope's presence in eastern Europe was the beginning of the end for the entire communist empire.

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The chapter ends with information gleaned from documents assessing the secret services' successes and failures during the colossal operation; on the whole they were pleased with themselves for deploying their agents well and avoiding any unexpected incidents. However, as Lasota writes, "this testifies to a failure to understand the Church's aims and expectations for John Paul II's pilgrimage. Seeking out nothing but threats arising from the activities of 'anti-social elements' during the visit was a gross over-simplification. The assumption that the Pope would refer directly to Poland's situation or demonstrate any kind of political sympathies is astounding for its intellectual shallowness and lack of logic. One should not overestimate the successes of the network of agents. From the documentation it appears they discovered nothing that...the Church would wish to hide, for a very simple reason: neither John Paul II or the Church in Poland had any intention of conducting any secret mission...John Paul II came to his home land with the Good News that had been preached for two thousand years. To deliver and understand it, there was no need to involve several hundred agents, over a thousand secret service functionaries and several dozen militiamen. But realising that simple truth proved a task far beyond the capabilities of the communist regime." Throughout the book we learn how the secret service misinterpreted the Church's aims and was constantly looking for non-existent direct political threats.

The **epilogue** covers the plot to assassinate the Pope, who in May 1981 was shot by Ali Agca, a Turkish terrorist, in St Peter's Square. Over the years since the incident, more and more evidence has come to light, showing that firstly the Bulgarian secret service was involved, then the KGB, and also other east European secret services, including the East German Stasi. A lot of effort went into covering up the trail leading to the true instigators of the crime. Agca's own version of events was inconsistent and misleading, and he was thought to be a lunatic, especially when at his trial he declared himself to be Jesus Christ. However, in the final count it is clear that the Kremlin authorities were worried about the Pope's potential influence on the entire Soviet empire as soon as he was appointed, and that

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the plot to kill him started immediately. To cover their tracks the KGB used the Bulgarian secret service, who used Turkish Islamic terrorists. The author describes evidence of Vatican infiltration by Polish and German agents that contributed to the plot, and how even inside the Vatican the Polish clerics in the Pope's closest circle were constantly spied on by agents who tried to manipulate them. But it was all too late – the Solidarity movement was underway, the Pope recovered from his injuries, and his second pilgrimage to Poland was inevitable. His arrival in 1983 brought an end to the dismal era of martial law. Though in the 1980s, as the regime declined there were attacks on priests, including the hideous murder by the secret service of Jerzy Popiełuszko, the tide had turned. During the Pope's third pilgrimage in 1987, the workers could boldly meet him with banners reading: "Holy Father, never come to the Polish People's Republic again, come to Poland."

Assessment

This unprecedented book is revelatory on several levels. Firstly, it demonstrates how the communist security services operated in fascinating detail, using direct quotations from its top-secret documents. It is astounding to learn how much energy and thought went into strategies and operations designed to compete with the Church, and to learn how misguided and unsuccessful these efforts were. One of the most interesting aspects of all concerns the secret agents working for the security services from within the Church, apparently driven by envy, personal gain and confused loyalties. The author provides intriguing discussion of their motivation and mentality, a topic that could probably fill several books.

The second level of interest concerns Karol Wojtyła's career. Although, as the author notes in his introduction, the book is not a biography, but is about Wojtyła's secret service record, it inevitably tells us a lot about his rapid rise within the Church and the skills that took him to the Vatican. Even from this sidelong view he is a fascinating personality, an individual who – while simply fulfilling his mission as a Catholic priest in a country where

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the regime opposed the Church – through his own sagacity and subtlety played a major role in bringing down communism and shaping the future of the world. His career has never been examined from this through-the-keyhole vantage point before. The book also tells us a lot about other impressive Polish clerics who unshakably conducted their faith in the hardest circumstances, such as Archbishop Sapieha and Cardinal Wyszyński.

At a third level, the book gives an interesting view of Polish post-war history, once again looking at it from an unfamiliar angle that shows how the system imposed on the country in the aftermath of the Second World War struggled to keep its hold, and inevitably came to grief. It also shows how what happened in Poland affected the entire Soviet bloc, and changed world history.

Lasota has made an excellent job of what must have been a very difficult task. From a huge amount of material he has managed to select documents that build up a portrait of all aspects of secret service activity with regard to the Church, and Wojtyła in particular, over four decades. He presents it clearly, with solid background information to explain the political context and the communists' motives at each stage.

Any foreign edition of this book would instantly appeal to Roman Catholics the world over, and to anyone interested in John Paul II. It would be just as interesting for anyone who wants to know more about the inner workings of the communist secret service, and to historians of communist Europe. The photographs are a bonus, allowing the reader to put faces to names, showing the Pope in less familiar contexts from the first half of his life, and giving an idea of the scale of public support for the Church in communist Poland.

Apart from putting the afterword at the start, I would suggest that a foreign edition would benefit from subtitles to break up the chapters and herald changes of topic within them. I would also add a timeline of historical events in Poland, Europe, the world, the Roman Catholic church and Karol Wojtyła's life, to provide a reference point. In translation the text will need some straightforward editing to explain various acronyms and institution

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names that are familiar to Poles, but not foreigners. The translator and/or editor should ideally have some knowledge of Polish post-war history.