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Marian Shrines under Marxism

by Arthur Jones

Time for an aside. The illustration of the Black Madonna, Our Lady of Czestochowa, has a personal connection. In December, 1983, the week Poland's Lech Walesa was due to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, I was in Poland to meet with Solidarity. Poland's dictator, Wojciech Jaruzelski, had forced the emerging Solidarity movement, which threatened the Soviet Union's grip on Poland, underground.



I needed to get from Warsaw to Krakow, where the meeting was to take

place, and to see the always embattled, Jerzy Turowicz, editor-in-chief of the Catholic newspaper, *Tygodnik Powszechny*. Jerzy would counter Jaruzelski's censors in a unique way. The censors would arrive on press day, examine the layout, and point to which stories he was forbidden to run. He would remove the type and the newspaper appeared with blank spaces where the articles would have been. (When Turowicz died at 87 in 1999, his mass card included the fitting Jan Kochanowki (1530-1584)

couplet: ?And if the road to heaven lies open, For them ?tis who serve their land.?)

Through a Polish academic friend, Jan Napoleon Sajkiewicz who had been teaching in the United States but returned home when Solidarity was suppressed, a clandestine Krakow trip was arranged. A cooperative Warsaw cab driver was given sufficient dollars to buy jerry cans filled with gas for the trunk of his cab, sufficient for the 180-mile round trip.

The arrangement included a slight diversion so I could visit the monastery at Jasna Gora and Czestochowa. At the appointed afternoon hour at the shrine for the appearance, I was the only ?Westerner? present. The attendees insisted as a point of hospitality that I be given a place at the front, and it was from there I witnessed the raising of the silver-plated steel door for the exposition of the legend-steeped millennia old icon. The icon is reasonably dated to 803, and by legend to the 4th century, as a discovery by Emperor Constantine?s mother, Helen, today known as St. Helen.

One image ? apart from that of the Madonna ? remains. Twenty years earlier, as the only Western journalist going in-and-out of Cuba, I was in Mexico City, the only place with a Cubana Airways flight to Havana. At that time, the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe was extremely accessible, one could get so close as to almost touch it.

Many of the penitent women visiting the Guadalupe shrine circumnavigated the shrine area on their knees.

Some 5,000 miles away, in Poland, I watched the same penitential suffering. Both times I thought, I doubt that Our Lady would want these elderly women inflicting yet more damage on their age-ravaged knee joints. (Cuba?s madonna, the Virgin of El Cobre, essentially another shrine under Moscow?s thumb at the time I visited, must wait until another time.)

The depiction of Our Lady of Czestchowa on this page is the one I brought back for my mother-in-law and rosary partner, Beatrice O?Brien.

For Marian Blog readers in the New York area, a free talk on Mary April 6 at the New York Public Library. It is by Judith Dupre, author of *Full of Grace: Encountering Mary in Faith, Art and Life*, with whose book we?ll become more familiar in the second half of April.

For details on talk and book, see the Web site: www.judithdupre.com.

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In The Marian Blog, *NCR* books editor Arthur Jones invites a discussion on

envisioning Mary, the mother of Jesus, in 21st-century terms.

Jones has been a Catholic journalist since before the Second Vatican Council. This month, Paulist Press releases his latest book, *Mary, a Mother Waiting, Raising the Messiah*. Jones describes his book as an exploration of the mother-son relationship of Mary and Jesus during the "hidden years," until she eases him front and center into his ministry at Cana.

You follow The Marian Blog and news about *Mary, a Mother Waiting, Raising the Messiah* on Facebook ([tinyurl.com/Mary-A-Mother-Waiting](https://www.facebook.com/tinyurl.com/Mary-A-Mother-Waiting)) and Twitter (twitter.com/anotherwaiting).

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