

Poland: Experts express serious concerns about Overbeek's book about John Paul II

Overbeek's book follows a predetermined agenda, its author does not have a historical background and is nearly completely uncritical towards the files of the communist Secret Police. This is the assessment of Ekke Overbeek's book published in Poland, *Maxima Culpa. Jan Paweł II wiedział* [Maxima Culpa. John Paul II Knew] of Marcin Przeciszewski, Chairman of Poland's Catholic Information Agency (KAI).

The publication has also been severely criticised by other Polish historians dealing with the most recent history of the Church.

The book concerns the conduct of the Archbishop of Krakow and later the Pope towards cases of paedophilia in the Church. The author tries to prove that John Paul II covered up cases of paedophilia among the clergy at the time he was Metropolitan of Krakow and continued to do so during his entire pontificate.

Discussing the work of the Dutch journalist, Przeciszewski said that the publication contains scathing but largely unfounded accusations against Pope Wojtyła. "The author completely ignores the fact that it was John Paul II who was the first pope to start a systemic fight against sexual abuse among the clergy, on a worldwide scale at that," stressed the head of KAI.

In an analysis published on the KAI website, Przeciszewski refutes Overbeek's theses and claims, accusing John Paul II of ignoring and covering up cases of paedophilia and of inaction in the face of this grievous problem. Przeciszewski recalls the successive steps taken by Pope Wojtyła since he became aware of the appalling scale of paedophilia in the United States, including his decisive addresses to the bishops of the USA and Ireland and the crucial document *Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela* (Protection of the Sanctity of the Sacraments) of 2001, which was followed by the norms of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *De gravioribus delictis* (On the most serious crimes), issued after the Pope's death.

Przeciszewski indicates that John Paul II was instrumental for putting in place regulations combating paedophilia in the Church all over the world. "Naturally, this information is not to be found in Overbeek's book," the publicist writes, citing examples of the book author's misrepresentations and biased interpretations used to drag John Paul II's name through the mire.

Referring to Wojtyła's conduct described in the book as the Archbishop of Krakow, the head of KAI draws attention to the reckless and naïve way in which the documents of the communist security services were approached. Dr Marek Lasota, a respected historian and long-time director of the Krakow branch of the Institute of National Remembrance, takes a similar view.

Focusing on four cases, Overbeek argues that Wojtyła, despite his knowledge, tried to cover up paedophile priests' crimes and, instead of explicitly punishing them, transferred them from one parish to another. Commenting on these sensational

claims, Dr Lasota stresses that one should take into account the fact that Cardinal Wojtyła delegated his duties, did not handle all cases personally and that even if certain documents reached the curia, he did not have to be up to date with all of them. "In other words, the overarching conclusion that he must have known about everything is unjustified in the light of these sources," points out the historian.

According to Marcin Przeciszewski, in order to reliably explain the cases of priests who, as subordinates of the then Archbishop of Krakow, sexually abused minors, it is imperative to carry out a proper query in the Church archives. The idea is not to draw uncritically from the files of the communist secret services, but to compare and contrast these documents with information in the resources of the Church.

"A special report on this subject, based on the contents of the archives of the Archdiocese of Krakow, seems advisable for getting to know the truth and also for a fair defence of John Paul II. It would be necessary in this case to abandon the practice of making such personal files confidential for a period of 50 years, because it seems necessary for the common good," concludes the head of KAI.