

**THE EXPERIENCE OF A CAMEROONIAN BY NAME NCHUMBONGA GEORGE LEKELEFAC FROM CAMEROON, CONTINENT OF AFRICA IN WADOWICE, POLAND – THE CITY OF BIRTH OF SAINT JOHN PAUL II: AN INTERNATIONAL CITY FOR PILGRIMAGE ON THE 100 ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF ST JOHN PAUL II, WRITTEN BY NCHUMBONGA GEORGE LEKELEFAC, DOCTORATE CANDIDATE, UNIVERSITY OF MUNSTER, GERMANY, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2020**

*“Do not be afraid! Open, in deed, open wide the doors to Christ! Open to his saving power the confines of states, and systems political and economic, as well as the vast fields of culture, civilization, and development. Do not be afraid! Christ knows ‘what is inside a person’. Only he knows!” (Saint John Paul II, Sunday Homily during the Mass for the beginning of his Pontificate, October 22, 1978, at St. Peter’s Square.*

### **Division of the Article**

This article is divided as follows: 1). Introduction; 2). Saint John Paul II, born in Wadowice, Poland; 3). Unique Pilgrimage Experience in Wadowice, Poland, Friday, September 25, 2020; 4). My Spiritual Commemoration of Saint John Paul II; a). Intellectual Commemoration; b). Spiritual Commemoration; 5). The Fantastic and Unforgettable Experience in Wadowice, Poland; and 6). Conclusion.

### **1. Introduction**

My name is Nchumbonga George Lekelefac. I am originally from Cameroon, in Africa. I am presently a doctorate student in Catholic Theology at the University of Munster, Germany, specialized in Ecumenism: Dialogue among Christian Churches, with the doctorate research topic: “Recognition of Baptism: The Initiative of Walter Kasper and the Reception in the Ecumenical Community”. I am very happy and honored to write this article about my experience in Wadowice, Poland in various languages to show that Wadowice is not only a small city in Poland, but an International City of the world which everyone needs to visit to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Saint John Paul II. That is the reason why I decided to write this article not only in the Polish language, but also in the following International Languages: **English, French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and German, languages which I speak fluently.** Saint John Paul II began speaking Polish, but later, he learnt many other languages. It is because of this that he could communicate in with many people and why he could travel to all the continents of the world. Like Saint John Paul II, the inhabitants of Wadowice have to copy this wonderful example of Saint John Paul II, because Wadowice has no become an international city thanks to the legacy of Saint John Paul II. Wadowice according to me is not only a city in Poland, but an international city for the Universal Catholic Church because Saint John Paul II was born there: Wadowice, a very hospitable city which I had the opportunity to visit for pilgrimage on Friday, September 25, 2020.

### **2. Saint John Paul II, born in Wadowice, Poland**

Pope John Paul II, “now Saint John Paul II, Latin Johannes Paulus, original name Karol Józef Wojtyła was born on the 18 May, 1920, in Wadowice, Poland—died April 2, 2005, Apostolic Palace, Vatican City; beatified May 1, 2011 by Pope Benedict XVI), ; canonized April 27,

2014 by Pope Francis; feast day October 22), the bishop of Rome and head of the Roman Catholic Church (1978–2005), the first non-Italian pope in 455 years and the first from a Slavic country. He was the head of the Catholic Church and sovereign of the Vatican City State from 1978 until his death in 2005. He was elected pope by the second papal conclave of 1978, which was called after Pope John Paul I, who had been elected in August to succeed Pope Paul VI, died after 33 days”. His pontificate of more than 26 years was the third longest in history. As part of his effort to promote greater understanding between nations and between religions, he undertook numerous trips abroad, traveling far greater distances than had all other popes combined, and he extended his influence beyond the church by campaigning against political oppression and criticizing the materialism of the West. He also issued several unprecedented apologies to groups that historically had been wronged by Catholics, most notably Jews and Muslims. His unabashed Polish nationalism and his emphasis on nonviolent political activism aided the Solidarity movement in communist Poland in the 1980s and ultimately contributed to the peaceful dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. More generally, John Paul used his influence among Catholics and throughout the world to advance the recognition of human dignity and to deter the use of violence”.

### **3. Unique Pilgrimage Experience in Wadowice, Poland, Friday, September 25, 2020**

I would like to share the unique pilgrimage experience that I had in Wadowice. On the 18 of May 2020, Catholics worldwide marked the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the birth of St. John Paul II, the Pope from Poland, born in Wadowice, who served as the Bishop of Rome and Pastor of the Universal Church from 1978 to his death in 2005. So many Pilgrimages planned for the occasion were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Pope Francis invited Christians all over the world, who followed the event on social media to continue a spiritual commemoration of the gift that St. John Paul II was to the Church and the world.

### **4. My Spiritual Commemoration of Saint John Paul II**

There are two ways in which I commemorated the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the birth of Pope John Paul II: They include: “The Intellectual Commemoration, and the Spiritual Commemoration”. Let me now elaborate on my spiritual experience:

#### **a). Intellectual Commemoration**

I, Nchumbonga George Lekelefac together with Fr. Herbert Niba Cheo wrote and published an article with the topic: “*The Impact of Pope John Paul II’s Visit to Japan, 23 – 26 February 1981*”, which was published in the Japan Missionary Journal (J.M.J): a long-standing Catholic publication in English dealing predominantly with all facets of evangelization and inculturation of Christianity in Japan. It approaches Christian mission from an Asian perspective. It boasts a history of over 70 years. The article was published in the Japan Missionary Journal (J.M.J) autumn 2020 and the scientific research article consists of 10 pages: from page 207 - 216. It is important for me to note that Reverend Father Herbert Niba Cheo, a Cameroonian like me, has great interest in the life of Pope John Paul II. He wrote and published the book: “The Way of the Cross with Saint John Paul II”, published by *Our Sunday Visitor*, (USA, 2019).

#### **b). Spiritual Commemoration**

After the publication of that article, I feel the need to visit the birth place of Pope John Paul II in Wadowice, Poland, and Krakov, the home diocese of Pope John Paul II. I contacted my very good and cherished friend, and classmate: Raimundus Jurolaitis. We studied together in Rome at the Pontificia Urban University, Rome, Italy from 2011 to 2014. He is a priest of the

Religious Congregation of “**FIGLI DI SANTA MARIA IMMACOLATA (FIGLI DI MARIA)**”, ordained on April 11, 2015 by Bishop Stanisław Salaterski, auxiliary bishop of Tarnow. Reverend Father Raimundus is a religious priest, and he is dedicated to service of God’s People at the “Santa Maria vergine Assunta” Parish, Brzozówka, close to the city of Tarnów. Reverend Father Raimundus Jurolaitis was so happy to welcome me to Poland. The plane departed the Dortmund Airport in Germany at 14:25 and landed at the Kattowitz Airport, Poland on Thursday, September 24, 2020 at 16:00. It was a very short flight: one hour, and thirty minutes. One of his brothers of their religious congregation: Reverend Father Janusz Kawa arrived at the airport to pick me up. During our trip home to their house, he told me a lot of wonderful things about Mexico and Poland. In fact, there are many things I did not know about Mexico that he informed me, because he was a missionary in Yucatan, Mexico for some years. During the drive, we communicated in Spanish, English, and Italian, and he taught me some Polish phrases. He was so hospitable and kind, and I enjoyed his wisdom and great sense of humor. Later in the evening, we had supper, together with the Superior of the Community: Priest Pietro Pacura. During supper, Priest Raimundas proposed that we first of all drive to Wadowice the next day, Friday, 25 of September, and later the Centre of Pope John Paul II and the Shrine of Sister Faustina.

### **5. The Fantastic and Unforgettable Experience in Wadowice, Poland**

On Friday, September 25, 2020, we left after breakfast to Wadowice, the birth place of St. John Paul II. Fr. Raimundas Jurolaitis accompanied me to the place with his car, a distance of about 1 hour. When we arrived there, he took me straight to the Parish of Pope John Paul II. When we arrived the parish, I was totally moved. I observed that many children were looking at me. It seemed they had never seen a black man before. I greeted them, especially the children. Father Raimundas took me into the Church and showed me the baptismal font where Pope John Paul II was baptised. Later, we took some pictures, prayed for a moment and went outside. As we were taking pictures outside, Klaudia, a worker at the Municipal Office in Wadowice, born in Wadowice, approached us and spoke in Polish. Father. Raimundas spoke with her. She inquired whether she could take a picture of me for the Facebook page of the municipality of Wadowice. She was attracted by my Cameroon Cultural Dress, among many other peoples, especially the children. She discovered we were speaking in Italian and immediately joined us in Italian, given the fact that she married an Italian. I told her briefly where I was from and she was very happy to see a pilgrim from Cameroon, Africa. She was very kind. After taking the pictures, she told us that she would like to give us some souvenirs of Wadowice, and asked us if we could wait for a moment. We gladly said yes, and after some minutes, Klaudia returned with two souvenir bags full of souvenirs of Wadowice which she gave to both of us. I thanked her and we continued our pilgrimage to Krakow at the Shrine of Sister Faustina and at the Pope John Paul II centre in Krakov. As we were going, many children approached me attracted by my cultural dress and wanted to take pictures with me. I gladly accepted. We also met two other groups of children who were happy to take pictures with me. The children were indeed excited and almost all of them wanted to take pictures with me. It was indeed a wonderful experience. Wadowice is a very lovely and hospitable city. Klaudia expressed that hospitality and kindness to me, and the fact that she could speak Italian made our encounter wonderful and totally successful.

### **6. Conclusion**

I would like to use this opportunity to thank God for having given me the opportunity to meet Father Raimundus Jurolaitis in the first place. He was totally good to me and took me to the most important places. I would also want to thank the members of the Religious Congregation:

**“FIGLI DI SANTA MARIA IMMACOLATA (FIGLI DI MARIA)”**: Reverend Father Pietro Pacura, and Reverend Father Janusz Kawa, for their extraordinary testimony of hospitality, fraternity and concrete love to me during my stay in Poland. Reverend Father Janusz Kawa accompanied me with his car to a hotel near the Katowitz airport given the fact that my return flight to Dortmund, Germany was at 6:45 in the morning. The fact that Reverend Father Janusz Kawa accompanied me to the airport was a great testimony for me because despite the fact that I was not directly his visitor, he was ready and willing to serve me, through his brother, Reverend Father Raimundas. I found this religious testimony unforgettable. I was able to learn how fraternal care and concern could be expressed in a religious community. In addition, the Religious Congregation: **“FIGLI DI SANTA MARIA IMMACOLATA (FIGLI DI MARIA)”** generously paid for my hotel bill for the night given the fact that they could not accompany me to the airport of Katowitz on Sunday morning, given their tight Sunday Mass schedule. I am profoundly grateful to their Religious Congregation **“FIGLI DI SANTA MARIA IMMACOLATA (FIGLI DI MARIA)”**, for having been so generous, totally hospitable to me and for having treated me like a brother, what a wonderful testimony of the Gospel Message. I will ever remain grateful. I pray that the Lord will continue to bless all the priests and missionaries of this distinguished congregation with long life, good health, constant joy and happiness, and the realization of all their missions in their various houses in the world. Amen. I sincerely thank Krzysztof for having been so nice to me and for having made me to learn so much about the Polish Culture. Thank you. My experience in Poland was totally wonderful and will always remain in my mind. Thank you Wadowice, thank you Poland. Long live Poland; long live Saint John Paul II. May we never forget the most powerful message of Saint John Paul II to the entire world: ***“Do not be afraid! Open, in deed, open wide the doors to Christ! Open to his saving power the confines of states, and systems political and economic, as well as the vast fields of culture, civilization, and development. Do not be afraid! Christ knows ‘what is inside a person’. Only he knows!”*** Like St. John Paul II, may we never be afraid to be open and good to others, to do our best in our lives, to transmit joy and happiness to others whenever we find ourselves. May we never be afraid to open the doors wide for Christ. Amen.

**End.**

*This article was written by Nchumbonga George Lekelefac, from Cameroon, Africa, presently a Doctorate Candidate at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität, Katholisch-Theologische Fakultät, Ökumenisches Institut, Münster, Deutschland, Europe. He will be happy to read your reactions to this article. You can contact him through Email: [nchumbong@yahoo.com](mailto:nchumbong@yahoo.com)*