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THE private secretary of Pope John Paul II has defended his decision to defy the man whom he served faithfully for 40 years by refusing to burn the late pontiff's personal papers.

Archbishop Stanislaw Dziwisz, who was at the Pope's side from his time as a Polish bishop until his death in April, said yesterday that although John Paul's will instructed him to burn the papers, he had not done so because they contained great riches.

Far from being destroyed, the papers would eventually be published, Mgr Dziwisz said. "Nothing has been burnt. None of it deserves to be burnt. Everything should be preserved and kept for posterity, for future generations— every single sentence. These are great riches that should gradually be made available to the public," Mgr Dziwisz told Polish radio. He gave no timetable.

In his last testament John Paul II said that he was leaving behind no property other than personal effects, to be distributed "as is thought fit". He asked Mgr Dziwisz, however, to supervise "the burning of all my personal notes".