“Gerard Mannion is to be congratulated for this splendid collection on the papacy of John Paul II. Well-focused and insightful essays help us to understand his thoughts on philosophy, the papacy, women, the church, religious life, morality, collegiality, interreligious dialogue, and liberation theology. With authors representing a wide variety of perspectives, Mannion avoids the predictable ideological battles over the legacy of Pope John Paul; rather he captures the depth and complexity of this extraordinary figure by the balance, intelligence, and comprehensiveness of the volume. A well-planned and beautifully executed project!”

—James F. Keenan, SJ
Founders Professor in Theology
Boston College
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts

“Scenes of the charismatic John Paul II kissing the tarmac, praying with global religious leaders, addressing throngs of adoring young people, and finally dying linger in the world’s imagination. This book turns to another side of this outsized religious leader and examines his vision of the church and his theological positions. Each of these finely tuned essays show the greatness of this man by replacing the mythological account with the historical record. The straightforward, honest, expert, and yet accessible analyses situate John Paul II in his context and show both the triumphs and the ambiguities of his intellectual legacy. This masterful collection is absolutely basic reading for critically appreciating the papacy of John Paul II.”

—Roger Haight, SJ
Union Theological Seminary
New York

“The length of John Paul II’s tenure of the papacy, the complexity of his personality, and the ambivalence of his legacy make him not only a compelling subject of study, but also a challenging one. This book, however, succeeds admirably in depicting both the light and shadow of John Paul. The authors have crafted a text that is comprehensive in its themes, nuanced in its approach, and always accessible in its expression. The book will serve as a valuable guide for all those wishing to engage further with John Paul II.”

—Richard Lennan
Professor of Systematic Theology
School of Theology and Ministry
Boston College
“Pope John Paul II was a towering figure in contemporary Catholicism. His was the second longest pontificate in the history of the church and it may prove to be one of the most influential. He wrote more encyclicals, canonized more saints, and visited more countries than any other pope in history. John Paul II’s ambitious papacy left a mark on the church sure to endure for decades to come. It is precisely the breadth of his contributions that has made any comprehensive assessment of this pontificate so difficult. Yet Gerard Mannion and a team of internationally renowned scholars have responded admirably to the need for a clear-headed guide into the thought and enduring influence of John Paul II. They offer us a volume of superb essays that avoid the extremes of hagiography and angry polemic in favor of penetrating analysis. This volume has set a very high standard for any future studies of the first Slav pope in modern history.”

—Richard R. Gaillardetz, PhD
Thomas and Margaret Murray
and James J. Bacik Professor of Catholic Studies
University of Toledo
The Vision of John Paul II
Assessing His Thought and Influence

Gerard Mannion, Editor
For Philomena Cullen
Grá Mo Chroi Thu
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Gerard Mannion
Groot Begijnhof, Leuven

*Feast of the Chair of St. Peter the Apostle*
Abbreviations
of works frequently referenced

General
AAS Acta Apostolica Sedis
CDF Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
CELAM Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano
CU Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity
ITC International Theological Commission

Karol Wojtyla
AP The Acting Person
LR Love and Responsibility
SR Sources of Renewal: the Implementation of the Second Vatican Council

Pope John Paul II
Encyclicals
RH Redemptor Hominis (1979)
DM Dives in Misericordia (1980)
LE Laborem Exercens (1981)
DeV Dominum et Vivificantem (1986)
RMA Redemptoris Mater (1987)
SRS Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (1987)
RM  
Redemptoris Missio (1990)

CA  
Centesimus Annus (1991)

VS  
Veritatis Splendor (1993)

EV  
Evangelium Vitae (1995)

UUS  
Ut Unum Sint (1995)

FR  
Fides et Ratio (1998)

EdE  
Ecclesia de Eucharistia (2003)

Other Teachings

AS  
Apostolos Suos (1998)

CL  
Christifideles Laici (1988)

CT  
Catechesi Tradendi (1979)

EAf  
Ecclesia in Africa (1995)

EAm  
Ecclesia in America (1998)

EAs  
Ecclesia in Asia (1999)

FC  
Familiaris Consortio (1981)

MD  
Mulieres Dignitatem (1988)

NMI  
N Govo Millennio Ineunte (2001)

OS  
Ordinatio Sacerdotalis (1994)

PDV  
Pastores Dabo Vobis (1992)

RD  
Redemptionis Donum (1984)

TMA  
Tertio Millennio Adveniente (1994)

TA  
Tredicim Anni (1982)

VC  
Vita Consecrata (1995)

Books

TB  
Theology of the Body (1997)

CDF Documents

DI  
Dominus Iesus (2000)

DVer  
Donum Veritatis (1990)

LC  
Liberatis Conscientia

LN  
Liberatis Nuntius (Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation) (1984)
Other Ecclesial Texts and Sources

EN  Evangelii Nuntiandi (1975)
HV  Humanae Vitae (1968)
PP  Populorum Progressio (1967)
PT  Pacem in Terris (1963)

Vatican II

AA  Apostolicam Actuositatem (1965)
AG  Ad Gentes (1965)
DH  Dignitatis Humanae (1965)
DeV  Dei Verbum (1965)
GS  Gaudium et Spes (1965)
LG  Lumen Gentium (1964)
NA  Nostra Aetate (1965)
SC  Sacrosanctum Concilium (1963)
UR  Unitatis Redintegratio (1964)
Introduction

The Challenges of Discerning the Legacy of Pope John Paul II

Gerard Mannion

Task and Challenge

To attempt to offer some account, explication, interpretation, and evaluation of any major historical figure is obviously a demanding task. When that figure has been the spiritual leader for over a quarter century of a church that grew in numbers from 757 million to well over a billion people, the challenge is magnified several times over. Karol Wojtyla was a profound person in so many ways. Attempting to offer an assessment of any pope and any pontificate is to enter into an exercise in hermeneutics. When it is a recent pope, with his impact and influence still so fresh, with issues and debates remaining very live in the church, the hermeneutical task requires a sharper edge to it still. So to offer a range of perspectives concerning the most recent pontificate of all demands that the task of interpretation should seek to remain true to the fundamental principles of hermeneutics and shun the temptation to be swayed by accounts too formed by deference, misplaced loyalty, polemics, or ecclesial politics of any wing.

The pope who is the subject of this study was a fascinating, intriguing, and yet in ways elusive character to try to assess. The many levels on which the profundity and ambiguity of his character, his passions, his beliefs, and his hopes existed have eluded precise fathoming and may well continue to do so in perpetuity.

The last weeks of John Paul II’s life bore testimony to the global significance of the first Slav pope. The evident sadness and also enormous excitement, interest, and debate generated in the lead-up and
aftermath of his passing demonstrated that this pastor was one of the leading figures of the twentieth century. People traveled from far and wide to pay their respects and file past his body and say a prayer for him. Around the world, Catholic churches were kept open long into the night while countless others offered prayers from afar. Such interest mirrored that generated when he was elected to the chair of Peter back in 1978, the first non-Italian to occupy that chair for four centuries. Just fifty-eight years old at the time, Cardinal Karol Wojtyla (b. 1920) adopted the title “Universal Pastor of the Church” and followed the example of the two preceding popes, whose names he combined as his own, by declining to have a coronation ceremony. And yet this papacy would be the focus of renewed divisions within the Catholic Church and wider Christian church alike, and would see the figure of the pope himself become the object of a personality cult of hitherto unprecedented global adoration and adulation.

In 1979 one of our contributors, Ronald Modras, stated that “if comparing the ideas of John Paul II since he became pontiff with his earlier writings shows anything, it is that he is consistent.”1 In relation to the subject matter of that article (John Paul’s understanding of magisterium and of the role and task of Catholic theologians), Modras is surely correct. Indeed, in a way resembling the constant determination to be steadfastly consistent of St. Augustine of Hippo (another “man from a far country” who went to Italy and left an incredibly deep impression upon the church forevermore), it is true that Pope John Paul sought to reiterate and reaffirm fundamental messages and teachings again and again. He certainly sought to be and indeed believed that he was utterly consistent. He sought to be the rock for the church in troubled and transitional times as befitting Jesus’ commissioning of Peter. And yet that is only part of the story, as our chapters will illustrate and, indeed, as Modras indicated in that article composed so early in the papacy itself.

The Hermeneutics of a Papacy of Paradoxes

My own relationship with this pontificate mirrors that of so many late-twentieth-century Catholics in being neither monochrome nor uniform

in character. Thus for myself the many differing characteristics of John Paul II and his pontificate have been enduring inspirations and challenges alike. Indeed no univocal and monochrome portrait of this servant of the servants of God could ever hope to suffice. At both the outset and in the aftermath of John Paul’s pontificate, obviously assessments were legion. Many tensions, enigmas, and, above all else, paradoxes of the man, his thought, teachings, writings, addresses, and actions remained to the end. So it is a daunting task to try to assess the life, thought, and influence of a Supreme Pontiff who served the church for so long a period. But, in the midst of the outpouring of judgments since his death, perhaps enough time has now elapsed to attempt to bring together a balanced range of perspectives. This was truly a person who evaded simplistic bracketing, this in relation to each of the personal, intellectual, and doctrinal aspects of his life and pontificate. No straightforward conclusions can be drawn in relation to much of his legacy. In fact, to suggest that he was, in so many ways, a paradoxical pope, is neither a pejorative nor a polemical statement, but rather reflects the intricacies that present themselves if anyone should neatly try to compartmentalize or pigeonhole particular aspects of the life, work, and ministry of Karol Wojtyla. As we will see, certainly there was much consistency in relation to various aspects of his life and thought, but numerous others demand a careful hermeneutical investigation that leaves preconceptions aside but which nonetheless entails a balanced ordering of both the principles of suspicion and retrieval alike. Numerous scholars and commentators have helped illustrate the dangers and pitfalls involved in assessing this giant figure of ecclesiastical history, whether in too positive or negative a light.

Many of these paradoxes were simply products of the cultural and social world in which this pontificate was served out. John Paul II bridged the transition of both church and world from the late modern to the postmodern era, with the joy and hope, the grief and anguish such entailed. Let us survey, albeit briefly, some of the complexities

2. Cf., for example, the telling remarks by, in the same issue, Edward Cuddy, “Unfortunately rebels have also been known to adopt the absolutism they once opposed. And the Pope’s roots in and East European Catholicism where religious survival was an endless struggle may spell a rigorously conservative papacy” in his article, “The Rebel Function in Catholicism,” Commonweal (September 14, 1979): 495–97, at 497.
involved in an assessment of this pontificate, many of which go far beyond the personal character of John Paul.

Consider, for example, the ironic fact, as Paul Thibaud put it back in 1979, that “the conclave was able to regenerate Roman centrality only by choosing a pope from the outside.”3 Indeed, that same 1979 issue of *Commonweal* (in which Modras’s essay also appeared) offered multiple articles that explored the tensions evident between the new pope’s past role as a rebel and dissident against pseudo-communist and totalitarian Polish society, and the role he would now adopt as guardian of the faith and one who would demand unswerving obedience of theologians to the magisterium. As with so many Catholic periodicals, *Commonweal* mirrored this range of assessment with a series of articles following John Paul’s death. And these equally illustrated the many paradoxes that one encounters in attempting to interpret the significance of this imposing figure.4

It is of great significance for the church and history alike the extent to which John Paul’s papal teachings bear the hallmarks of his own challenging and complex background, and how, under the totalitarian regimes of first the Nazis and then the pseudo-communists, he developed a philosophical and theological outlook that has been described as Christian humanism or personalism. His calls for a new economic way between capitalism and Marxist communism would prove to be preemptive of later developments in world politics, at least in terms of political ideology if not practice. He encouraged much renewal in Catholic spirituality and devotional practices, and canonized more saints than all his predecessors combined. A relentless traveler, his social progressiveness and earlier philosophical dynamism became matched in intensity by a theological conservatism in relation to many issues. To name but a few controversial examples that attracted the attention of the media on frequent occasions, he vociferously upheld church opposition to artificial birth control and the ordination of women, and upheld the norm of priestly celibacy.

It is fair to say that the pontificate of John Paul was no stranger to controversy, and he had not only admirers and devotees aplenty but


also his critics both within and without the Catholic Church. Although he pledged to see the Second Vatican Council through to its full implementation, some accused him of undermining its legacy and of steering the church in a direction more resonant with the church of a bygone age.

Again, regardless of one’s approval or otherwise of such, it is beyond question that under John Paul II the church became still more centralized in authority and governance, with dissent little tolerated and outspoken theologians, philosophers, and church people rebuked. During his pontificate the official church condemned many progressive movements (e.g., liberation theology, We Are Church) particularly with regard to aspects of their calls for societal and ecclesial reform.

And yet the paradoxes of this pontificate are brought into particularly sharp relief when one considers how conservative and right-wing ecclesial movements (e.g., Opus Dei, Communion and Liberation, Focolare) were actively encouraged. The founder of Opus Dei, Josemaría Escrivá, who is alleged to have frequently castigated the legacy of Pope John XXIII and even Vatican II itself, and at whose tomb in Rome Cardinal Karol Wojtyla often prayed, was canonized with rapidity, while Oscar Romero, although designated a “servant of God” by John Paul, still awaits beatification even to this day. While Pope John Paul II demanded unswerving obedience to the magisterium, particularly affirming the need for submissiveness to diocesan bishops, he removed Opus Dei from the jurisdiction of local bishops in 1982. Indeed, critics suggest that Rome regularly bypassed the College of Bishops on innumerable occasions during his pontificate, the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) going so far as to deny that national episcopal conferences have any teaching mandate at all.

This was the pope who gifted stoles and pectoral crosses to successive archbishops of Canterbury, who prayed with them and who joined with them in significant ceremonies in richly symbolic venues such as Canterbury Cathedral and St. Paul Outside the Walls in Rome. And yet during this pontificate, the prefect of the CDF would suggest that Leo XIII’s pronouncement that Anglican orders were invalid was a teaching beyond question, indeed “definitive doctrine,” and much of the work of the Joint Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission would be rejected and downplayed in significance by Rome itself.
In the early years of his reign ecumenism flourished, but in later years it stalled in many ways, despite the pope inviting dialogue on the future nature of the papacy and on his papal primacy. Statements on numerous topics, such as theological inquiry, interfaith questions, and lay ministry similarly became more conservative and restrictive in outlook the longer this pontificate endured.

Many have attempted and yet struggled to unravel the further paradoxes that embraced both a radical commitment to social justice and an authoritarian rule of the church from Rome. This pope regarded the downfall of the old pseudo-communist Eastern European states as a major triumph for the church, yet elsewhere he forbade priests from actively engaging in politics. He vociferously defended human rights at the same time that his curial departments were accused of breaching the rights of church members accused of dissent and error. Yet, with a fervent energy even in the midst of failing health, he sought to prepare the church for a new millennium, calling all to renewal and forgiveness. He apologized for many of the past failings and wrongs of those in the church.

In previous assessments, some critics even pointed to a “betrayal” of Vatican II; others wondered how much John Paul was a “prisoner” of the Vatican and curial system. He was a great pastor and churchman in Poland and initially transferred this personal devotion of the faithful to the world stage. But in his later years many Catholics became increasingly ambiguous toward this long-serving pontiff, mirroring the paradoxical nature of both the era and many aspects of the pontificate itself.

Yet the outpouring of devotion, admiration, and sadness at his passing, along with the fervent praise for his achievements witnessed throughout the church and wider world alike, demonstrated that John Paul had at least as many devoted supporters as critics. Indeed, the instant clamor for his canonization, along with the immediate campaign to have him henceforth known as “John Paul the Great,” further illustrate that history will record him as a giant figure not only in the long story of the church but also in the story of the wider world in the second half of the twentieth century.
The Purpose of this Volume

Thus the impact of John Paul II, one of the longest-serving popes in history, upon not just the Catholic Church but, indeed, upon the world at large, has been deemed to be immense by his most fervent supporters and sternest critics alike. There have been many, many books written about John Paul II and they greatly range in form, style, and quality. Some veer toward the hagiographical, while others are equally imbalanced in their one-sided negativity. Some study particular aspects of his life and thought, while some attempt to give a biographical picture or a general account of his ideas and achievements. This volume seeks to avoid merely concentrating upon the formulaic styles and topics of discussion that are frequently covered elsewhere and aims, instead, to broaden the range of the perspectives and debates on John Paul II, his life, his work, and his teachings.

Hence, the collection of essays is designed to provide a range of perspectives on the life, thought, and influence of John Paul II and to serve as a handbook and academic resource that can be used profitably by all engaged with and interested in not just John Paul II but also the recent story and future prospects for the Catholic Church. It is designed not to be a definitive judgment on this pope and his legacy, but rather to provide an ongoing resource and timely provision of overviews and assessments on a number of key topics of historical, ecclesial, and moral significance. In particular, the majority of chapters attend to themes that will remain pertinent to contemporary discussions and debates for some time to come.

A Balanced Range of Perspectives

Seeking to constitute a balanced collection of essays, we have collected an international group of contributors with perspectives included from scholars and specialists haling from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America, including several scholars renowned in their respective fields, and encompassing specialists in systematic and moral theology, ecclesiology, social doctrine, ecumenism, interfaith dialogue, and philosophy. True to the overarching hermeneutical intention of the volume, the various essays attempt to explain, explore, analyze, assess, and evaluate the life, writings, work, ministry, and ecclesial vision of the
The Vision of John Paul II

person and pope; Karol Wojtyla and Pope John Paul II cannot and should not be divorced from one another. With the exception of a single essay that appeared previously (on John Paul II and Vatican II), each chapter has been commissioned for this volume. There is no hagiography in these pages, but neither is there polemic in the opposite direction. Instead there are genuine and honest attempts to assess various aspects of the significance of a very long papacy. The triumphs and controversies alike are covered. To do otherwise would present a misleading impression and would be unfair to not only our readers, but to the subject of the volume himself.

Our collection begins with a biographical chapter, followed by chapters exploring John Paul II’s philosophical background and corpus and his relationship to Vatican II, before turning to consider his vision of and for the church itself, embracing a general analysis of ecclesiology during this pontificate as well. There follows a discussion of his “defense of the faith,” particularly in relation to the changing understanding and exercise of magisterium during his pontificate and the impact this had upon Catholic theological inquiry and practice. Several chapters concern still further aspects of his work and influence, hence an assessment of John Paul’s legacy in relation to justice followed by a wider consideration of the sources of moral theology in his thought and teachings. The topic of theologies of liberation is considered without balking at the difficulties involved in opening up such ecclesial wounds once more. Additional chapters discuss broader issues of ecclesiological significance, such as episcopal collegiality. So, too, are the experiences of women and those who opted for the consecrated life during this papacy explored. Final chapters cover the very important areas of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. Hence, several chapters explore various debates in relation to John Paul’s life and influence that remain “live issues.” Although, of course, there is necessary cross-referencing between the chapters, we have taken every step to ensure complementarity as opposed to repetition.

This volume does not seek to be the final word but rather to encourage further discussions and reflection upon a papacy and a person of truly great and lasting significance for church and world alike. In a richly evocative paragraph that concludes one of his many illuminating journal articles, Richard Gaillardetz offers some wise words concerning the
attempt to discern John Paul’s legacy that I hope readers will continue to bear in mind as they read through this volume:

It would be a mistake to underestimate [John Paul’s] formidable intellectual gifts, his indomitable energy, even in his waning years, and his sweeping world vision. In many and important ways this pope has been a unifying force in the Church by sheer power of personality and by the common recognition of his unique role as a voice for truth and justice in our world. Yet in the end, this pontificate, as with all others, will have to await the judgment of history. Only the passing of time will confirm the ultimate success or failure of his ambitious program to provide one united voice to a world desperately in need of the saving message of Jesus Christ.5

Thus one hopes that the provisionality of the approach and ideas put forward in this volume will be seen as a strength. “Final words” will not be offered, and it is hoped that few will come seeking such. In reflecting upon a pope who gave so much to the world and who generated such great affection, debate, and even controversy, who stirred passions and energies in so many quarters, yet in an age when for many the church has also been forced to endure a starless night, perhaps it is fitting to leave the last words here to Karol Wojtyla himself, as we recall his verse of penetrating self-assessment, which, when all is said and done, calls us to silent pondering of the legacy of this oftimes enigmatic pontiff:

I am a giver, I touch forces that expand the mind;
sometimes the memory of a starless night
is all that remains.”6

By whatever standard one chooses, the life of Karol Wojtyla was extraordinary. There are many accounts of his life and, full of incident as it was, perhaps no life of a recent pope has been so well known. In part this is simply a result of the length of his reign. As Pope John Paul II, Wojtyla’s pontificate was the second longest in the two millennia of the church’s history, from October 16, 1978, “the year of the three popes”—remarkable enough in itself—down to his death on April 2, 2005. Leaving aside the “papacy” of St. Peter, in length of time it was outdone only by the thirty-two-year reign of Pius IX who was fifty-two years old when elected, six years younger than Wojtyla.

Such longevity itself has consequences, not least the opportunity to model the church according to one’s own conception of what it should be—which, one cannot help thinking, is why the cardinals in conclave after a long pontificate choose an older man to succeed to the throne.


Abbreviations

to come

Perhaps the cardinal electors recognize, maybe even subconsciously, that there is something not quite “catholic” about the church when one person, no matter how highly placed, can attempt with some success to mold the church according to his own particular vision. Be that as it may, no pope has issued more encyclicals than John Paul II, no pope has proclaimed more saints, and none has created more cardinals. But then only two, Pius IX and Leo XIII, had quite as much time to do so. Indeed, given the difference in the number of years each presided over the church, Pope Paul VI at least managed a proportionally comparable number of cardinals to the creations of John Paul II.

But undoubtedly no other pope traveled so widely. Until the time of Paul VI, of course, no Roman pontiff had a realistic opportunity of doing so. It is true Pope Paul traveled, but to eucharistic congresses, to the UN, or to the Holy Land: quite specific voyages of which much was made at the time. They were highlights of his pontificate but not part of its very essence, as the papal voyaging has appeared to be during the last quarter of the twentieth century. The figures are staggering. Quite apart from his many journeys around the Italian peninsula in his nearly twenty-seven years as pope, John Paul II left Italy nearly a hundred times.3

Above all, and despite the warning that comparisons are odious, it is doubtful that there has ever been so intellectually gifted a bishop of Rome, with two well-earned doctorates, one in theology, the second in philosophy. Previous popes have published books, though usually before, rather than during, their pontificates. Pope John Paul published three books while pope. His most significant writing, apart from his encyclicals, was a hefty, challenging, and philosophically sophisticated study, *The Acting Person*, which was first published in Polish in 1969 when he was Archbishop of Krakow.4

**Early Career**

There is no doubting his intellectual achievements in philosophy and theology, but by all accounts he was also no mean soccer player, his preferred

3. He touched down in 181 countries, some of them more than once, and Poland eight times. He visited two Muslim countries, Sudan and Morocco—three, if Turkey is included.

position being, somewhat predictably as it now seems, that of goalkeeper. He was also a canoeist, a skier, and something of a mountaineer. And not only was he an all-around sportsman, he acted, and considered taking up the stage as a career. He wrote plays, at least one of which was thought good enough to be performed in a major theater. Even as an assistant bishop he still found time to publish theater criticism. He also went on to compose and, what is more unusual, to publish poems, a collection of which appeared while he was pope.

He found scope for at least some of these talents at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, which he attended after leaving school. There he studied the humanities, specializing in Polish literature. The choice of the Jagiellonian University was perhaps inevitable, given its proximity to his hometown, but it was also significant.

The university had been named after Jagiello, the grand duke of Lithuania whose marriage in 1386 to the eleven-year-old Polish queen Jadwiga brought about the union of Poland and Lithuania, a high point in the history of both nations. Krakow was then the capital, and remained so until the end of the sixteenth century. It was chiefly the Jagiellonian that supplied teachers to staff the universities elsewhere in the new Poland that emerged after World War I, for it was in Krakow in particular that the sense of Polish identity, language, culture, and religion was preserved through the long years of suppression after the country had been partitioned among Russia, Prussia, and Austria. For a time in the nineteenth century, Krakow was a Free City, in the governance of which the rectors of the Jagiellonian played a leading role. Even after the Free City had disappeared into the relatively benign rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1846, it still served as a center of Polish nationalism. In this confused historical geography of the period, the future pope’s father, also named Karol, had served in the army of the empire, rising through the ranks to become a noncommissioned officer.

5. *The Jeweller’s Shop* was given its world premier in Hammersmith, London, in April 1979.


7. Relatively benign compared with Russia, which tried to impose Orthodoxy, and with Prussia, which did likewise for Protestantism. This region of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was known as Galicia.
Lolek, as the young Karol Wojtyla was nicknamed, was born on May 18, 1920, not two years after Poland had been reestablished as an independent state in the aftermath of World War I, and only a few months after its boundaries had been redrawn formally to include Krakow and Wojtyla’s birthplace of Wadowice, a small town of—then—some fifteen thousand inhabitants, fifty kilometers to the southwest of Krakow. In 1980, addressing a UNESCO gathering in Paris, he said:

I am the son of a nation that has lived through the greatest experiences in history, a nation which, though condemned to death by its neighbours, has survived and remained itself. It has conserved, regardless of foreign occupation, its national (as distinct from its political) sovereignty, not by depending on the resources of physical power, but uniquely by depending on its culture. As it happened, this culture revealed itself as being a greater power than all the other forces.8

In September 1938 Lolek began his studies in Polish language and literature at the Jagiellonian. He was not left free to study for long. On September 1, 1939, just a year after he had become an undergraduate, Germany invaded Poland. Soon afterward 184 professors of the university were arrested and deported to Sachsenhausen. Wojtyla was sent first to a quarry, where he worked for a year, and then to a chemical factory; when he wrote in his encyclicals about the hard toil of laborers he, perhaps alone of the popes (since in the early centuries of the church when some were sent as captives to the lead mines of Sardinia), knew firsthand the reality of which he was speaking.9 And although the city of Krakow itself survived unscathed, at least outwardly, the pope likewise knew firsthand some of the terrors of war, the clandestine meetings, the fear of arrest, the disappearance of those judged hostile to the regime. And Krakow, of course, is not far from the horrors of Auschwitz.

While still at school, he had several times taken part in plays put on by a history teacher at a neighboring girls’ school. In all he took part in ten such productions, always being allotted the leading role, which was usually a heroic, patriotic one. After the fall of Poland the friend who had directed plays in Wadowice came to Krakow, and Wojtyla once

more took up acting. Together they founded a new theater company, the Rhapsodic Theatre, which survived the war only to be closed down by the communist regime. Plays were performed in private houses. There was no scenery and few props; all had to depend on the power of the word, which Wojtyla regarded as an advantage.

Explicitly or implicitly, the plays performed by the theater company had a heroic and patriotic message. He wrote of the fall of Poland in November that year:

No matter how this has come about and who is to blame for it, one thing becomes obvious: in Europe, Poland has been the greatest martyr, she whom He [God] had raised as Christ’s bulwark for so many centuries . . . I think that our liberation ought to be a gate for Christ, I think of an Athenian Poland, but more perfect than Athens with all the magnitude of Christianity, such as our great poets imagined, those prophets of Babylonian captivity. The nation fell like Israel because it had not recognised the messianic ideal, already raised like a torch—but unrealised.10

In nineteenth-century Polish romantic literature, by which Wojtyla was much influenced, the dismembered country had been a figure of the suffering Christ.

Wojtyla explored these themes in two plays he wrote about this time. In the prologue to Job he explicitly draws a parallel between the time of Job and Poland in 1940. He develops a similar argument in Jeremiah, which he even subtitles “a national drama.” The first two acts of the play take place on Palm Sunday 1596, at the outset of Poland’s greatest period of power, its “golden age.” Wojtyla saw its role as a buffer between infidel Turk and schismatic Russian. The setting of the play is a gathering for a sermon to be delivered by a Jesuit priest, Piotor Skarga, who was renowned for prophesying that Poland would fall if it did not put its house in order. Skarga is a historical character, as are the other dramatis personae, though in reality they were not all alive at the same time. One of the central characters is St. Andrew Bobola, another Jesuit and a Polish aristocrat, who was murdered by Cossacks in 1657 and canonized as a martyr in 1938. Wojtyla’s play closes in 1620 with a Polish defeat in battle. In his sermons Skarga analyzed the ills of society

10. Quoted in Wojtyla, Collected Plays and Writings on Theater, 73.
and condemned in particular the oppression of the poor. As Wojtyla did
in his play, Skarga equates Poland with Jerusalem. “Let the theatre be a
church where the national spirit can flourish,” wrote Wojtyla to his friend the theater director.

Lolek’s mother had died when he was nine, and his elder brother—
by more than a dozen years—died a couple of years later, leaving his
father as his only close relative. Father and son lived together in a flat
in Krakow, and it was only after his father’s death—and surviving being
accidentally knocked down by a German truck—that Wojtyla decided
to become a priest rather than an actor. He started his studies in secret
while still working at the chemical plant. He later joined those preparing
for the priesthood in the clandestine seminary hidden within the palace
of Archbishop Adam Stefan Sapieha. The immediate occasion of his
taking refuge in the archiepiscopal palace was a roundup by the Ger-
mans of all young men who might have taken up arms against them.
The house where Wojtyla was living was searched, but he escaped un-
noticed and took refuge in the archiepiscopal palace.

When the war was over he traveled to Rome for doctoral studies,
leaving Krakow just a fortnight after his ordination on November 1,
1946. His supervisor in Rome for his thesis on the notion of faith in the
Carmelite mystic St. John of the Cross was Réginald Garrigou-
Lagrange, perhaps the leading Dominican Thomist of his day. He be-
came, though after Wojtyla had traveled back to Poland, the chief
adversary of what was known as “the new theology,” a theology charac-
terized by a “return to the sources,” to the Bible and the fathers of the
church. Pope John Paul’s Thomism owes far more to that of Garrigou-
Lagrange than it does to the modern school, though it is the theology of
Karl Rahner, Yves Congar, and Edward Schillebeeckx, all influenced by
la nouvelle théologie, which had the most impact upon the documents of
Vatican II.

11. Ibid., 5.
12. Much has been made of the impact on the life of Wojtyla by the early death of his
mother. “Such speculations, frequently based on amateur psychoanalysis conducted from
afar, are of no use to serious students of Wojtyla’s life,” says Weigel (Witness to Hope, 29).
There had also been a sister, but she died, it seems, when only a few weeks old.
13. Wojtyla had been introduced to the writings of the Carmelite mystics by a devout
layman in Krakow, Jan Tyranowski.
But in fact it was not neoscholasticism of any variety that became Karol Wojtyla’s preferred style of philosophical or theological thought. After his return to Poland for a brief period in a country parish and then work in Krakow itself as a curate and university chaplain, he went to the university of Lublin to begin a doctorate in ethics, making a special study of the ethics of Max Scheler—a man whose own ethics, one should perhaps add, scarcely lived up to the ideals that moral philosophers put before their readers. Scheler and many others, including Edith Stein whom Wojtyla as John Paul II was, rather controversially, to canonize, had been much influenced by the thought of the founding father of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl. Not that John Paul would ever forget the rather traditional Thomism of Garrigou-Lagrange. As the Fordham philosopher John Conley commented on reading the pope’s writings, “I often have the impression of banging into scholastic steel as I wander through the phenomenological fog.” But in the end it was in philosophical phenomenology rather than in theological scholasticism that John Paul was to be most comfortable.

As a theologian, John Paul did not greatly return to the “sources” in the manner of the practitioners of the nouvelle théologie. His use of the Bible, for instance, falls more into a meditative than a strictly scientific category and is sometimes the despair of Scripture scholars. Nonetheless he has used it powerfully to put before the world that fundamental question which straddles the boundaries of philosophy and theology: what is it to be human? This is a topic he treats in a distinctly phenomenological fashion.

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14. To be more exact, the controversy was attached to her beatification in Berlin in 1987. Stein, known as a Carmelite nun under the name of Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, was beatified as a martyr. A martyr, of course, is someone who dies for his or her faith. But Edith Stein was put to death because she was by birth a Jew, not because she had become a Christian.


16. Cf. also, chapter 3 of the present volume.

17. See the article by Terrence Prendergast and the response to it by James Swetnam in McDermott, The Thought of Pope John Paul II, 69–97.

An example of this approach is to be found in his first book, *Love and Responsibility*. It was published when he was already a bishop—he was named assistant bishop of Krakow in July 1958, learning of the appointment while on a canoeing and camping trip with students, and was consecrated on September 28th that year. The origins of the book lay somewhat earlier. He had been a popular student chaplain and an equally popular lecturer at the University of Lublin. Students willingly accompanied him on these camping and canoeing holidays. In their discussions, especially with a group he took to the Mazurian Lakes in 1957, lay the genesis of this book on sexual ethics. He reflected upon their experience, assisted by a close friend, an eminent woman psychiatrist in Krakow.

The book was a spirited, if radical, defense of Catholic sexual ethics in the face of a communist government’s efforts to undermine the church by undermining traditional family values. It stays close to the traditional Catholic view that marriage, though it may have many purposes, is primarily for the procreation of children, a position which, less than a decade later, the Second Vatican Council carefully avoided endorsing. Although Wojtyla regularly puts the female before the male (i.e., “woman and man,” rather than vice versa), there are limits to such feminism: trusting “surrender” of the wife to her husband is for him the distinctive trait of the woman in love, and “possession” is the characteristic modality of the devotion of the man to the woman he loves. There is no mention of abortion, none of premarital sex or homosexuality. On the other hand, it is remarkably frank on the sexual pleasure enjoyed by both men and women. Too frank for some, it seems, and Wojtyla apparently considered dropping that particular section from his book, though in the end, and with the encouragement of the Jesuit Henri de Lubac, he retained it. It was this book that encouraged Pope Paul VI to appoint the by-then Archbishop Wojtyla (he was named Archbishop of Krakow on December 30, 1963) to his commission on birth control. In the end he never attended, the Polish government making it difficult for him to obtain a visa to leave the country. Whether he

would in any case have been swayed by the arguments eventually contained in what became known as the “Majority Report” in favor of the church approving at least some methods of artificial contraception, one may well doubt. He was opposed to such means in *Love and Responsibility* and remained so throughout his life.

This was evident in his preaching as well as in his encyclicals, especially *Veritatis Splendor* of 1993 and the follow-up, *Evangelium Vitae*, two years later. That these issues of sexual morality loom so large in the papal teaching, however, is perhaps not simply because they were in themselves major issues. Although many if not most Catholics shared the pope’s opposition to abortion, the same could not be said of their reaction to Pope Paul VI’s *Humanae Vitae* of July 1968. It is generally acknowledged that very many Catholics simply ignored Pope Paul’s endorsement of the Minority Report produced by his birth control commission. This appeared to John Paul as a significant act of disobedience to the papal magisterium. It was the desire to call Catholics back into line that determined one aspect of the trajectory of Wojtyla’s papacy. It was that which took him from Rome to so many different Catholic communities around the globe.

**Election**

But first he had to be elected. He was chosen by his fellow cardinals on the eighth ballot, on October 16, 1978. Conclaves are intended to be secret and to remain so. George Weigel remarks that little is known about what happened beyond the fact that Wojtyla occupied cell 91, and that he took with him into the conclave, presumably as recreational reading, a journal of Marxist philosophy.22 It is nonetheless generally accepted that the main contenders were the cardinal of Genoa, Giuseppe Siri, and the cardinal of Florence, Giovanni Benelli, representatives respectively of the conservative and liberal factions among the cardinals. When it became evident that neither stood a chance of defeating the other by the requisite two-thirds majority, the candidature of Wojtyla rapidly advanced. It is also widely agreed that his chief backer, the “great elector” in conclave parlance, was the cardinal of

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22. Ibid., 252.
Vienna, Franz König, who knew him, liked him even if he thought him somewhat conservative, and in any event wanted a non-Italian.

Despite Weigel’s remarks on conclave secrecy, a detailed account of the voting is provided by Francis Burkle-Young, and his version sounds highly credible. He accepts that König was the main player in the choice of Wojtyla, but argues that the election came about as the conservative faction, realizing they could not move forward with Siri, switched their votes to the cardinal of Krakow. Thus if Burkle-Young is to be believed, Wojtyla was elected because he was conservative, not something that was evident to the church at large, who knew little of him before he appeared to acknowledge the applause of a rather stunned crowd in the piazza below. “Forgive me if I make mistakes in your—no, our, language,” said Papa Wojtyla, addressing the crowd from the loggia of St. Peter’s. The “your—no, our” was very theatrical—the former actor had not lost his old skills—but it had the desired effect: the Italians, deprived of an Italian pope for the first time since the death of the Utrecht-born Hadrian VI in 1523, loved him for it.

Among the Polish romantic poets of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries whom Karol Wojtyla had once so assiduously studied, there was a strong sense of destiny. For an oppressed people without leaders they provided a different kind of leadership and elevated the national consciousness of the Polish people by portraying them as liberators not only of their own land, under Russian, Prussian, and Austrian domination, but of other countries as well. Some put this into practice, leaving Poland to fight in the American and Italian revolutions. They were therefore not enamored of popes such as Gregory XVI and Pius IX who, in 1830 and 1848 respectively, appeared to betray nationalist aspirations. One of the chief among the romantic poets, Juliusz Slowacki (1809–49) even wrote a poem on the flight of Pope Pius IX.

24. Siri had announced in a newspaper interview that, were he elected, he would reverse many of the changes brought about by Vatican II. He had intended that the interview would not appear before the conclave opened, and would therefore not be seen by the cardinal electors, *incommunicado* in the Sistine Chapel. Unfortunately for Siri, *Gazzetta del Popolo* published it a day early.
25. Wojtyla had become archbishop of Krakow on March 8, 1964, and was named cardinal on June 28, 1967.
from Rome in November 1848. In the poem he foretold the coming of a “Slavic pope,” a “brother to all mankind.”26 This Slavic pope would be made of sterner stuff than Pius IX. John Paul II was the first Slavic pope, and he was conscious of his destiny.

The first of his many overseas journeys was to Puebla, Mexico, in January 1979. This visit to the meeting of the Latin American bishops (CELAM) was to have been undertaken by Paul VI. John Paul took over and set the tone for the remainder of his pontificate. He was vigorous in defense of human rights, but equally vigorous in criticizing what he regarded as the politicization of the church in the name of liberation theology. Though not itself Marxist, liberation theology undoubtedly drew some of its inspiration from a Marxist analysis of Latin American society. Though ready enough himself from time to time to use Marxist concepts (that of “alienation” in particular27), he had lived too closely with a communist regime to be prepared to tolerate what appeared to be so close an adhesion to Marxist philosophy.28

Naturally he had no such problems during his visit to Poland, his next foreign trip out of Rome. He spoke again of human rights, but his message to the episcopate was different. They had, he said, a special obligation to preserve, not Catholicism precisely, but Polish culture. “It is well known,” he said, “it is precisely culture that is the first and fundamental proof of a nation’s identity.”29 That took him on to the issue of European identity:

Europe, despite its present long-lasting divisions of regimes, ideologies and economic and political systems, cannot cease to seek its fundamental unity, and must turn to Christianity. Christianity must commit itself anew to the formation of the spiritual unity of Europe. Economic and political reasons alone are not enough. We must go deeper to the ethical reasons. The Polish episcopate, all the episcopates and churches have a great task to perform.

27. Cf., for example, Centesimus Annus 41.
28. In Centesimus Annus he provides his own critique of Marxism, cf. 22–24. This was, of course, after the collapse of communist regimes in Europe.
Despite its unhappy history, Poland had retained its identity through its culture, at the heart of which was Christianity; Europe, the pope seemed to be saying, ought to do likewise.

The papacy has always been Eurocentric. Despite his many travels, that remained true of John Paul II. At the opening of his pontificate, the pope from Poland was understandably preoccupied by the communist domination of so much of Eastern Europe. In April 1979 he addressed members of the European parliament. He told them very firmly that Western Europe was not Europe; Europe included also the states of the East. Soon afterward he addressed the European bishops. Europe, he said, is the cradle of creative thought. Toward the end of 1980 he declared Cyril and Methodius, the apostle of the Slavs to whom he afterward dedicated an encyclical, patron saints of Europe. On October 8, 1988, he visited various European institutions in Strasbourg, including once again the European parliament, where the Reverend Ian Paisley, later to be Northern Ireland’s first minister in a power-sharing executive embracing Catholics and Protestants, had to be removed from the chamber for abusing the pope as Antichrist. On this occasion, John Paul II warned the members not to have too narrow a notion of what constituted Europe. “Other nations could certainly join those which are represented here today,” he said. “My wish as supreme pastor of the universal church, someone who has come from Eastern Europe and who knows the aspirations of the Slav peoples, that other ‘lung’ of our common European motherland, my wish is that Europe . . . might one day extend to the dimensions it has been given by geography and still more by history.”

A year and a half earlier he had spoken of Europe as embracing the continent “from the Atlantic to the Urals.” By the time he used that phrase, during a homily at Spire in France in May 1987, the die, as far as the Soviet bloc was concerned, was already cast. Opinions will differ about the significance of the role played by the pope in the collapse of communism. Nonetheless it is highly probable that if the pope had not

30. I do not accept the line taken by Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi in their biography of John Paul II that there was an unacknowledged agreement between the Vatican and the Reagan administration on how to bring down communism. One has only to recall that in December 1981 the Vatican took the unusual step of calling a press conference to deny Reagan’s claim that the Holy See favored sanctions against Poland. Cf. His Holiness (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 358–61.
made his historic visit to his homeland in 1979, Solidarity, the Polish trade union and populist movement, would never have become the force that it did. The support given by the pope to Lech Walesa and the other leaders of Solidarity kept them, at least to a degree, safe from government persecution and prevented the complete suppression of their movement. And what happened in Poland proved a catalyst for the other nations of Eastern Europe.

John Paul II was appropriately modest about his own role. His encyclical *Centesimus Annus* of 1991 contains a very realistic assessment of the failure of communism, for economic as well as ideological reasons. Agostino Casaroli, Cardinal Secretary of State from 1979 to 1990, once remarked that the Holy See was surprised by the speed of the collapse, and it is highly unlikely that John Paul II himself was expecting quite so sudden a demise. He, like Cardinal Wysziński, had in 1981 been afraid of a Russian invasion of their country, though there were others in Poland who believed, probably correctly, that Russia, bemired in Afghanistan, was by that time no longer in a position militarily to suppress an uprising in its satellite countries.

But if the USSR could not suppress revolt, did it attempt to eliminate the pope himself? On May 13, 1981, at 5:17 in the afternoon Mehmet Ali Agça, a member of the fascist Turkish group the Grey Wolves, shot the pope as he was being driven across the Piazza of St. Peter’s in his open popemobile. At least three shots were fired and two in the crowd of pilgrims were injured, but not seriously. The gravely wounded pontiff was driven directly to the hospital, where he was to remain until June 3rd. He was, perhaps, released from care too soon: on June 20th he was back in the hospital, this time not returning to the Vatican until August 14th, though during that time he was able to conduct much of the routine business of the papacy, including nominating Józef Glemp, his former secretary, to replace the Polish primate, Cardinal Wysziński, who died a fortnight after the assassination attempt.

A mystery surrounds Ali Agça. He was already a convicted terrorist, having assassinated the editor of a respected Turkish newspaper in 1979. He had, rather remarkably, escaped from custody, and had written a letter to the newspaper whose editor he had murdered, saying he would kill the pope were he to visit Turkey, which the pope had done without incident. It is difficult to believe that Agça mounted the assassination attempt
entirely on his own, but there is no evidence from such material as has become available since the breakup of the USSR that the KGB was involved, as many suspected. Some thought at the time that the KGB was acting by proxy through the Bulgarians (there was a series of suspicious events at the Bulgarian embassy in Rome just at that time), but that also has been largely discounted. The affair remains without an adequate explanation. The pope, who immediately forgave his would-be assassin and visited him in prison, appeared to make a full recovery. Much later, however, Monsignor (now Cardinal) Stanislaw Dziwisz, John Paul’s secretary who was with him in the popemobile, commented that the assassination attempt had in the long term damaged the pope’s health. The pope’s own interpretation centered not on the attempt but on the fact that the professional assassin failed to kill him, which he clearly regarded as miraculous and gave thanks to Our Lady of Fatima, whose feast day falls on May 13th. He later visited Fatima and gave the shrine the bullet that had struck him in the stomach. It is now in the crown on the head of the statue of the Virgin of Fatima.

If John Paul had suspicions that one of the communist satellite regimes, or the KGB itself, was behind the assassination attempt, he kept them to himself. It is perhaps one of the surprising aspects of John Paul II that, as already remarked, he was not wholly unsympathetic to Marxism. He has made a great deal of use, both as a philosopher and in his social encyclicals, of the concept of alienation, and he readily accepts that there are “grains of truth” in the socialist program. And he was clearly no great admirer of the consumerism which seems to be inevitably associated with Western capitalism: one may recall the howls of protest which arose, especially in the United States, at the “moral equivalence” he once seemed to be suggesting between capitalism and communism.

34. Ibid., 179–85.
35. See also the speeches of “The Stranger” in Our God’s Brother (Wojtyla, Collected Plays and Writings on Theater, 188–92).
Whereas previous popes in their social encyclicals had condemned the injustices suffered by workers, from his experience of living under a communist regime the late pope recognized that it is the dehumanizing processes which they suffer under oppressive systems of whatever kind that is the greater threat to their dignity. His solutions were therefore not solely economic but also cultural and religious.

Similarly, John Paul’s vision of one Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals was not simply a political one. It was also cultural and religious. One has to remember that the Poland of today is a much more religiously homogeneous nation than the Poland into which Lolek Wojtyla was born. It is not just that the Jewish population has, tragically, been vastly reduced in number, but the Greek Rite Catholics with whom Lolek Wojtyla would have been familiar in his youth have disappeared back into the Ukraine. There of course, after World War II, their style of Catholicism was brutally suppressed and forced into the Orthodox Church.

In re-creating a unity across Europe the pope was, from the beginning, conscious of the need to improve relations with the Orthodox Churches, and especially, though not only, with the Russian patriarchate. This proved to be one of the major failures of the pontificate, though it is something for which John Paul II himself can hardly be blamed. The revival of the Catholic Churches of the Byzantine Rite, particularly though not only in the Ukraine, has given rise to innumerable problems, not least problems concerning the ownership of property. The Byzantine Catholics have perhaps not always behaved in the most conciliatory manner, but the pope believed that right is on their side.

This does not alter the fact that the revival of the Catholic Byzantine Rite Churches has been resented by the Orthodox. And the Moscow patriarchate has also been angered by what it sees as Roman Catholic proselytism in the sacred territory of Holy Russia. It is perhaps difficult for those used to living in a religiously plural world to understand the depth of Orthodox feeling or to sympathize with it. But the Vatican under John Paul II was not always as sensitive as it might have

36. Here cf. also chapter 13 of the present volume which explores ecumenism in greater detail.
been to Orthodox susceptibilities: witness the appointment of a Polish-born archbishop\textsuperscript{37} to preside over Catholics in Moscow.

What was at issue was the link between religion and national identity, a link important to the Russians but also to John Paul II. It has been remarked above that Krakow was the center of Polish national identity when Poland itself did not, politically, exist. Catholicism was central to that identity. The pope has constantly urged the many nations he has visited to take pride in their national culture and to recognize as the cement that holds together the power of religion. This is one of the reasons for his creation of so many saints, and his desire whenever possible to beatify or to canonize them in their native or adopted lands. Saints are for the pope not only exemplars of Christian living, heroes, one might say, of the Catholic faith, they are markers in the Christian history of a people, reminders of the faith of one’s ancestors which he believes ought to be celebrated as a central aspect of one’s national history and cultural identity.\textsuperscript{38}

But the identification of religion and national identity is a heady, and dangerous, doctrine: just how dangerous has been seen above all in the Balkans. The former communist regime had suppressed without—except perhaps in the case of Albania—extirpating religion, and kept warring Catholics, Orthodox Serbs, and Muslims in more or less peaceful coexistence. As his warning to the late President Franjo Tudjman of Croatia bore witness, the pope was aware that the revival of religious consciousness as part of a struggle for national identity had its dangers.

\textsuperscript{37} Transferred by John Paul’s successor to a less-controversial see.

\textsuperscript{38} It is well known that John Paul II created a large number of new saints. From the first papal canonization in 996 down to the establishment in 1588 of the Congregation of Rites, which was originally charged with overseeing the process, the number of formal canonizations is 111; those canonized from 1588 down to 1963—i.e., down to the election of Pope Paul VI, is 350. Paul VI created 92 saints in 20 ceremonies. John Paul II conducted 52 ceremonies, an average of 2 ceremonies for each year of his pontificate in comparison with Paul’s 1.3. In the course of the 52 ceremonies he canonized no fewer than 483 saints. Those doing the math will realize that, taking all formally canonized saints together, up to the pontificate of John Paul II, 551 persons had been raised to the altars. In other words, the late pope canonized more saints than all his predecessors of the past 450 years—from the establishment of the Congregation of Rites—put together, and practically as many as had been canonized from the time the popes started to take the process over. He canonized three times as many saints each year as did Paul VI.
It was as much a challenge for Christians as it is for Muslims—and indeed, though in a somewhat different context, for Jews.

The late pope’s concern for ecumenical relations in the context of the reunification of Europe has been mentioned. He also tried to reach out across the faiths. As a boy in Wadowice one of his closest friends was Jewish, an unusual situation in Poland. Karol Wojtyla shared little or none of the prejudices of many of his fellow countrymen. As pontiff, relations with Judaism meant an accord between the State of Israel and the Holy See, the first visit of a reigning pontiff to a synagogue, and the deeply emotional visit to the Holy Land in March 2000. He also visited Muslim countries, and was generally, though not everywhere, welcomed, but relations between Catholicism and Islam have not greatly progressed. John Paul II was no supporter of peace at any price, as his attitude to conflict in Kosovo and Rwanda indicated. Nonetheless his unremitting opposition both to the Gulf War and the more recent war in Iraq reflected the very reasonable fear that these wars do serious damage to relations between Christians and Muslims.

So among what might be called Pope John Paul II’s geopolitical aims were the overcoming of communism, the reunification of Europe, improved relations with other churches but especially with the Orthodox Churches of Eastern Europe, and the establishment of links with other faiths, Judaism in particular and to a lesser extent Islam. Some of these aims progressed but with varying success.

This essay has attempted to demonstrate some of the ways in which the early life of Karol Wojtyla helped to form the style of the pontificate of Pope John Paul II. As has been seen, one of the aspects of his youth was the impact, both through his acting and through his study of literature, of the vision of the Polish romantic poets of the nineteenth century, and in particular the poetry of Juliusz Slowacki with his “prophecy” of a Slavic pope. Wojtyla’s apparently charmed life before his entry into the seminary and the fact that he so narrowly escaped death in the as-

39. His friend survived the war and eventually settled in Rome, where the friendship was reestablished.
40. During a visit to Nigeria early in his pontificate, a group of imams who had been scheduled to meet him failed to appear.
assassination attempt\textsuperscript{41} reinforced his belief that he had a particular mission given him by God. “I am constantly aware,” he said in an interview, “that in everything I say and do in fulfilment of my vocation, my ministry, what happens is not just my own initiative. It is not I alone who act in what I do as the Successor of Peter.”\textsuperscript{42} He carried this messianic sense with him to the end of his life.

\textbf{Final Years}

Even in the early 1990s it was clear that he was ill, an illness rapidly identified as Parkinson’s disease, though the Vatican was unwilling, at least initially, publicly to acknowledge the fact. He continued with his punishing round of foreign visits but could no longer kneel to kiss the earth as he descended from his plane. At first it seemed admirable, but as time went by it was painful to watch. It is known from his testament that he considered resigning, and Cardinal Dziwisz has confirmed it. Clearly he was suffering, but he had a very positive view of suffering: “The passion of Christ on the cross,” he wrote in Memory and Identity, “gave a radically new meaning to suffering, transforming it from within. It introduced into human history, which is the history of sin, a blameless suffering, accepted purely for love.”\textsuperscript{43} Christ, he said to a general audience, did not come down from the cross. The comparison is illuminating. Christ’s suffering was redemptive. Did Pope John Paul, as an element in his almost messianic vision of his papacy, see his own suffering as in some way also redemptive? If so, it would explain why he struggled on to his death in the Vatican Palace on April 2, 2005. The presence of such hordes of world leaders at the funeral mass witnesses to the huge impact Karol Wojtyla had exercised in his years on the throne of St. Peter.\textsuperscript{44}

Each papacy molds the church, and, as I remarked at the beginning, only one pope has had a longer time to do so than did Pope John Paul II. But he also molded the papacy itself. He altered the form of papal

\textsuperscript{41} “It was as if someone was guiding and deflecting that bullet,” John Paul II, Memory and Identity, 179.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 187.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 190.

\textsuperscript{44} On his declining health, see Cornwell, The Pope in Winter, 262–70.
discourse, which no longer wholly depended upon the hitherto traditional language of natural law theory when talking about ethics. He claimed for the papacy the role of moral arbiter in world affairs. He changed the understanding of the manner in which a pope fulfills his office. Nonetheless, one may question how long the late pope’s model of the church will survive. Forms of papal governance, it could be argued, have tended to mirror those contemporary forms of governance found in society at large. So there have been popes who were medieval barons, popes who were renaissance princes, popes who were enlightened despots, popes who veered to the democratic, and there have even been popes who were simply bishops of Rome (though that was rather a long time ago). And now, it seems, as a legacy of Pope John Paul II we have a presidential pope.