

Pope John Paul II

A Man of Peace Dies

“Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

—Isaiah 9:6

THIS WONDERFUL PROMISE was written by the Prophet Isaiah 750 years before our Savior was born into the world as a perfect man. Jesus was to be a special gift from our loving Heavenly Father as a ransom price for the sin-sick and dying human family. (I Tim. 2:6) Among the several titles that would be ascribed to him, as indications of the various roles of his glorious majesty, we especially note his title ‘The Prince of Peace.’ In further testimony of this most blessed event, and the prophetic reference to being called the Prince of Peace, we note the Apostle John’s words concerning him. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”—John 3:16

In fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, our Lord Jesus was born into the world in accordance with God’s

due time. His title—The Prince of Peace—will not be realized until he assumes this future role at the time of his inauguration as earth's king. At that time, he will manifest this particular feature of his reign, and will exercise his authority as supreme ruler of the world by putting down all unrighteousness and disobedience amongst the people. (I Cor. 15:25) All who are in their graves will also come forth to be uplifted and blessed by his righteous rule. (John 5:28,29) Under the administration of Christ's Kingdom, mankind will surely have learned the terrible results of sin and disobedience to the Divine law. His glorious power will then be grandly shown as the Prince of Peace when he offers peace, joy, and everlasting life to all—"God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."—Rev. 21:4

KAROL JOZEF WOJTYLA

The recent death of Pope John Paul II marks the end of one of the longest reigns of any leader in the history of the Roman Catholic Church. Karol Jozef Wojtyla was born in Wadowice, Poland—a small town in the southwestern part of the country—on May 18, 1920. He died April 2, 2005 at 84 years of age, thus ending his pontificate of twenty-six years. He died peacefully in his private apartment at the Vatican.

Karol Wojtyla was born into a family home with parents that faithfully, and strictly, practiced the Catholic religion. His father was a retired soldier in the Polish army, and his mother was a teacher in the Polish school system. As a child, he was

acquainted with death, as his mother died when he was nine years old, a brother when he was twelve, and his father died in 1941.

WOJTYLA'S EARLY LIFE

As a young man, Wojtyla was robust, and enjoyed a wide range of athletics and rigorous physical activity. His intellectual interests in those early years were directed toward poetry, religion, and the theater. After graduating from secondary school, he enrolled at Jagielloian University in Krakow, where he pursued studies in literature and philosophy. He set his academic interest aside to enter the priesthood. While continuing his studies he eventually earned master's degrees and doctorates in theology and philosophy. As a priest, he continued his studies while being posted as a chaplain at Krakow University. Later he became archbishop of Krakow, and eventually rose to the rank of cardinal.

THE POLISH POPE

Having strong interests in the church, Wojtyla began to fulfill his lifetime desire to assume an active role in serving those of the Catholic faith. He thus became a prime candidate for the office of pope when his predecessor died. He became the first Polish pope in Vatican history, elected to this office on October 16, 1978. Some officials associated with the church were concerned because he was about to assume the most powerful office within the Vatican. There was also the concern that he was chosen to succeed Pope John Paul I who had died after only a month in office.

At 58 years of age, Pope John Paul II was the youngest man to sit on the throne of the Catholic

Church during the twentieth century. His strong and varied educational background had prepared him well for his new position as pope. He spoke eight languages fluently and partly understood some others. This particular skill alone would later be used by him as a means to reach out to the many that he would visit during his many travels abroad.

A MAN OF PEACE

The late pope will be remembered as a man of peace. Through his commitment to ecumenism and interfaith dialogue, he helped to break down many conflicts that have long divided the religious world. He was a voice for peace in a violent age and society. He possessed outstanding personal characteristics that were immediately recognized, and had a certain magnetism that attracted people. This proved to be true, not only among those of Catholic faith, but others also who began to pay attention to his manner and style. John Paul II had the talent to reach out to the people, and they responded in a way that had not happened before. His spontaneous, friendly and outgoing manner earned him the reputation as being one of the most-loved pontiffs of any of his many predecessors, and he made sincere efforts to open up dialogue with others whenever, and wherever, possible. Young people especially appealed to him and he was always ready to address their concerns. As a man of peace he generated warmth and peace wherever he went.

During his long reign, John Paul II became the most widely traveled pope in the history of the ancient church, and visited over one hundred countries throughout the world. He was seen and known by millions of people who flocked to catch a

glimpse of him, and international television networks broadcast his many activities and travels. For twenty-six years he rendered his service to those of the Catholic faith, as well as to countless others, with a message of peace.

CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP

Since his election to the high office of the Church of Rome, John Paul II expressed his leadership and charisma in many ways. He delivered more speeches, attracted more crowds, met with more world leaders, visited more countries, and was seen by more people than all of his many predecessors put together. His charismatic leadership and free style opened up new channels of dialogue between the Catholic Church and Protestant faiths. He also had a keen interest in opening up communications between Christianity and the Jews, and was the first pope to visit a Jewish synagogue. Turning his attention to those of the Arab world he became the first pope to visit a Muslim mosque.

VATICAN II

During his pontificate, John Paul II strongly supported the proposals that were set forth during the second Vatican Council, called by his predecessor Pope John XXIII in 1962. Church officials had met at predesignated times and places over a period of four years to discuss many recommendations for change. They realized the necessity to come to some meaningful conclusions regarding the need to define the church's new role, scope, and mission in the rapidly changing world of the twentieth century. It was unanimously agreed that much needed reform was necessary to modernize the ancient church, and many issues were discussed and adopted.

During that four-year period the council of Vatican II produced sixteen new documents that expressed Catholic social teachings. This was done to mark a fundamental interest and shift toward modernizing the church. These documents included such things as the use of the vernacular language, increased participation by the laity, and other important social issues. These proposals also led to further postcouncil church documents that were later considered regarding Catholic social teaching.

JOHN PAUL'S AGENDA

John Paul II established his agenda by including the social proposals of Vatican II. His worldwide ministry focused on bringing the church into the modern world, and to expand its influence to a greater audience. He was a driving force behind more than fifty major Catholic Church documents dealing with a wide range of themes in which he brought the teachings of the church to bear on nearly every aspect of modern-day life.

He wrote a series of academically well-received books and papers dealing with relationships between religion and philosophy, and also the Catholic Church's concept of sexuality. His writings include three major encyclicals addressing economic and social justice issues. On the prevailing issues of moral relativism in our modern world, John Paul II wrote *Veritatis Splendor*, which addressed the modern church's moral teachings; *Evangelium Vitae*, which defended human life against what may now be called a culture of death; and *Fides et Ratio*, which shows that human reasoning can never be separated from our continued faith in God. Through all of these issues there is

a common theme that human freedom must never be confused with separating ourselves from God and his love.

APOLOGY FOR PAST WRONGS

While attempting to expand Catholic teachings into new areas of modern life, John Paul II addressed the Vatican's need to acknowledge and apologize for the church's past mistakes. He was the motivating voice, often against strong opposition, that forced this matter to a conclusion. His efforts opened up critical studies relating to the church's role in the Inquisition. Among the earliest apologies given was in October 1992, when he addressed the church's error in condemning Galileo Galilei to life in prison as a heretic because his beliefs differed from those of the church. Galileo's book, which was published in 1632, was banned because he supported the view that the sun was the center around which the various planets rotated. Galileo remained under house arrest for the rest of his life, and died as a condemned heretic.

In August 1993, John Paul II admitted the church's involvement in the evil African slave trade. In May 1995, he apologized for papal financial and political support for the religious wars that followed the Protestant Reformation. In May 1998, he addressed the church's inactivity and silence surrounding the holocaust of World War II. His apologies also included regret to the patriarch of Constantinople for the plundering of Constantinople by Christian forces from the west during the Crusades of the early thirteenth century. The relationship between Christianity and Islam has been permanently altered since that time.

DISAPPOINTMENT AND SCANDAL

Despite the pope's friendly and open manner of leadership, he has not been without criticism from those who have disagreed with him and some of his policies. This was especially true regarding his enforced rigid adherence to basic church teachings on subjects such as divorce, abortion, gay rights, rights for unmarried couples, and other matters.

A major scandal came to light that created great disappointment and embarrassment to him regarding the large number of priests who were alleged to have molested children. We first learned of this crisis in 2002 when it erupted in Massachusetts. It was then uncovered in many other dioceses in the United States, as well as in Canada, Australia, Latin America, and parts of Europe, including the pope's native country, Poland. In an article appearing in Steve Quale's *News Alert* (April 6, 2005), it was reported that "Aside from the Papal meeting with the U. S. cardinals, the Vatican tended to leave the scandal in the hands of American church leaders, although it did amend a proposed U. S. bishops' discipline policy in 2002 to ensure that accused priests' rights were respected. Since then the Holy See has not intervened."

Another item from *CNN International* (April 4, 2005) reported, "The pedophilia scandal exposed a major breach of human rights in the life of the Church generally. Although John Paul II ultimately recognized it as a scandal, this scandal needed much stronger action at a much earlier time.

"Church reform groups also criticized the way the pope centralized decision making in the Vatican and let its bureaucracy, the Curia, discipline critical theologians. Although he was deeply committed

to reform and dialogue in the world at large, he strengthened the centralized, authoritarian structures within the Church itself. This fostered a climate of fear and rigidity.” (The Curia is the Vatican Bureau that handles daily operations).

Another issue that has been disappointing to the church concerns their inability to encourage young men to join the priesthood. Despite many years of reform and an unprecedented worldwide ministry, it must be acknowledged that today there are fewer priests relative to the number of Catholic parishioners than when John Paul II assumed office in 1978. At that time the worldwide ratio was 1,800 Catholics per priest to shepherd them. Now the number has risen to 2,600.

WOMEN’S RIGHTS

Other matters concerning human rights also remain unresolved—issues that concern gender equality. These include recognition and respect for one’s orientation, the right for priests to marry, and the more contentious issue of women’s ordination. The issue concerning women’s ordination to the Catholic priesthood was addressed in the *Los Angeles Daily News* (April 3, 2005). Kay Raftery said: “Pope John Paul II was a mixed blessing to Catholic feminists. He held an open hand to women on many fronts, such as career equality, human rights, and lay leadership, but he showed the back of his hand on the charged issue of priestly ordination.”

The pope officially closed the church’s door on the issue of women’s ordination in his apostolic letter of 1994 under the heading: “On Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone.” In the letter, he made

his position clear by stating that the church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women, and that judgment is to be definitively held for all the church's faithful.

ALL MUST DIE

Death is the greatest enemy to be endured in all human experience. Its reality generates sorrow and tragedy of unprecedented dimension whenever it occurs. This was true when millions of Catholics throughout the world mourned the loss of their dead church leader. Many from other faiths were also saddened by his death. World leaders attended John Paul II's funeral in Rome to pay their final respects. There are countless numbers of people throughout the world, however, who die every day, and leave family and loved ones to sorrow over them. All must pay the penalty for sin, and all must die. (Ezek.18:4) No one, great or small, has ever been able to save themselves from the terrible sentence of death.

EVERLASTING LIFE

Everlasting life is mankind's most cherished hope and dream. When Adam was created in the Garden of Eden he was endowed with physical capabilities that enabled him to live forever. But, because of his disobedience to God, the entire human race was made subject to the sentence of death that had been imposed upon him. Man lost his earthly dominion, and was sentenced to die.

Restoration to life, however, is assured through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus, who died as the world's Redeemer. Jesus took Adam's place in death, and thus brought salvation to all. "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be

made alive.” (I Cor. 15:22) Jesus paid the price for sin nearly two thousand years ago, but the merit of his shed blood has not yet been applied on behalf of the human family. During the present Gospel Age, our Lord’s merit is being applied to his footstep followers as a means for their justification, and for the purpose of presenting their own lives in sacrifice to God. This class of faithful believers is the church of the Gospel Age that will share with our Lord Jesus in offering everlasting life to all under the terms of Christ’s future 1,000-year kingdom.

THE CHURCH

The word church [Greek: *ecclesia*] means ‘to call out,’ and identifies those Christians who respond to our Lord’s calling—“I have chosen you out of the world.” (John 15:19) They separate themselves from the world, its pleasures, hopes, and pursuits. Paul explains that this is a sacrificial call—“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” (Rom.12:1) Each group of believers, regardless of size, thus constitutes an *ecclesia* (church), all of whom have separated themselves to follow Jesus, deny self, and proclaim the teachings of our Lord.

‘THE EVERLASTING FATHER’

Pope John Paul II was a man of peace, and the spiritual father to over a billion people of Catholic faith throughout the world. He was in a unique position to encourage, strengthen, and help his people. Yet, he was unable to give to the people the very thing they need and want the most—that is, true, lasting peace, and everlasting life. Our Lord

Jesus will have the ability, power, and authority to carry out this wonderful program during the time when his kingdom of truth and righteousness will be established over the earth. At that time, all the willing of mankind will be lifted up and brought back to life.

Among the various titles that were enumerated in the feature text of this treatise, and ascribed to our Lord Jesus by the prophet (Isa. 9:6), included not only the Prince of Peace, but also the Everlasting Father. The word father means lifegiver, and it is in this sense that our Lord Jesus is called the Everlasting Father. He has purchased the human family, and will, under the administration of his kingdom, be the only means by which the people may obtain everlasting life. The prophet used this same expression when he wrote, "I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open."—Isa. 22:21,22

During the time of Christ's Kingdom our Lord will assume all of the roles that were ascribed to him by Isaiah. Mankind will then rejoice when the king of earth manifests these powerful and enduring features of his righteous rule. The world's new government will be 'upon his shoulders,' and he will then be their Wonderful Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. May we continue to look forward to that grand time when this scripture in Isaiah is fulfilled. ■