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POPE JON PAUL II, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE NEW WORLD ORDER

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Abstract

This paper reflects on the life, legacy, and global impact of Pope John Paul II within the context of the Catholic Church and the emerging New World Order. Delivered as part of a memorial lecture marking the anniversary of his passing, the study situates itself within an effort to honor and critically engage the contributions of one of the most influential figures in modern Church history. It examines the ways in which Pope John Paul II shaped the theological, moral, and socio-political direction of the Catholic Church, as well as his broader influence on global affairs. By analyzing both the positive and potentially contentious aspects of his legacy, the paper seeks to provide a balanced evaluation of his role in addressing contemporary challenges facing the Church and the world. In conclusion, it aims to assess how his teachings, leadership, and pastoral witness contributed to shaping the present global order and the Catholic Church's place within it.

Keywords: Pope John Paul, Catholic, world order, and politics.

Introduction

As the Church comes close to her commemoration of the 1st anniversary of the glorious passing to the great beyond of one of her noblest sons in human history, the Pope John Paul II Major Seminary Awka, could never be involved in any better way than her present on-going memorial lectures in honour of whom she bears her name. I am therefore most delighted to be part of this epoch-making activity when at the committee sittings of this event I was asked to give a lecture titled: Pope John Paul II, the Catholic Church and the New World Order. And my role is not so complicated for if I understood my topic well, it is nothing other than x-raying the ways John Paul I positively or negatively influenced the Catholic Church and the World we now live in.

The Coming into Scene of John Paul II

Twenty-eight years ago, as the fairly long pontificate of Paul VI drew to a close, a consensus on the qualifications for the next pope began to be formed among liberal Catholic opinion-makers. For this group of thinkers, the next pope should be a dynamic, convinced leader: one who has a grip of the modern world, a man of deep spirituality, acquainted with contemporary intellectual life, an advocate, a Christian who radiated hope, a charismatic figure who could revitalise the public face of Roman Catholicism at the end of the twentieth century. The new pope, they maintained, should also be a man of the second Vatican Council, committed to safeguarding the Council's teaching in the thought and practice of the Church. However, the new pope should escape the gilded cage of the Vatican and bring the Gospel message to the nations; what the Church and the world needed, they thought, was more an apostle than a CEO of Roman Catholic Church, Inc. Preferably, the new pope would have allembicing pastoral experience and the last but the greatest of all, he should be non-

Italian.

Among the majority of the Cardinal College, it was obvious that Vatican II had been a great achievement whose promise had not been realized because there had been mistakes made in its implementation. What was needed then was a re-assessment to see how implementation of the Council could be improved.' As that dialogue was going on, a further consensus emerged: The Church needed a pope of dialogue, a man of vibrant public personality who would symbolize Catholicism's openness to the world, and a Pope who would set a comprehensible theological and pastoral direction.

There was no doubt therefore, as to the consensus on what the Church and the papacy needed, but what was a bit surprising was the election of Cardinal Albino Luciani of Venice, a man who was hardly mentioned in the feverish pre-conclave media speculation.

In spite of the vitality of his public presence, deep goodness and considerable catechetical skills, John Paul I never thought of himself as *papabile*. He was a sick man when he was elected which the Cardinals did not know. However, he accepted with trepidation the task of shepherding Christ's faithful. Neither him nor the electors who thought they had found the answer to the Church's post-conciliar crisis by choosing him, knew that he was to be a Pope for a very short period. On early morning of September 29, 1978 his papacy came to an end and the Church was once more plunged into crisis. At this time, came a renewed discussion of non-Italian pope?² and speculation had turned on the other side of Europe especially the Polish Church regarded then as a "praying Church" and which was very strong at that time the universal Church was in deep crisis.

Karol Wojtyla, despite his relative youth, had become by 1978, "one of the most widely respected senior leaders in Roman Catholicism. He was known to be an intellectual of considerable voltage, a man eager to engage contemporary culture and to make the dialogue between Catholicism and modernity a genuine two-way street. He had grappled with and understood modern intellectual life but he was not an ambiguiist. Indeed, he probably understood the complexities and ambiguities of real human lives better than most academics, and on the far side of ambiguity he had discovered a new, more securely grounded certainty." Thus, Wojtyla was a *papabile*.

This being the case, it was normal then that after the first Conclave which met a deadlock between yet another two Italian Cardinals, the candidacy of Wojtyla became irresistible and the college had to move very fast to elect him in the second Conclave.

Preparatory Antropological Perspective

a. Practical life-experience

His experience of the brutality of the Nazi occupation as a student and seminarian, followed later, by that of the tyranny of communist oppression, gave him a unique perspective on the fundamental truths about man that needed to be proclaimed and defended by the Church. In his own words:

The two totalitarian systems which tragically marked our century - Nazism on the one hand, marked by the horrors of war and the concentration camps, and communism on the other, with its regime of oppression and terror - I came to know, so to speak, from within. And so it is easy to understand my deep concern for the dignity of each human person and the need to respect human rights, beginning with the right to life. This concern was shaped in the first years of my priesthood and has grown stronger with time.'

Thus, John Paul II was prepared for a new approach to the world through the hard lessons from the tragedy of the second world war and the evils of communism. Writing later to the Polish bishops to mark the fiftieth anniversary of that war that devastated their homeland, he reminded us again the challenge such 'devastation' reading of history poses to the twenty-first century: "The Second World War" , he wrote, "made all people aware of the magnitude

... which contempt for man and the violation of human rights could reach. It led to an unprecedented marshalling of hatred, which in turn trampled on man and on everything that is human... Many people were led to ask whether, after that terrible experience, it would ever be possible to have any certainty again".⁶

From these experiences, he was therefore ready and convinced that the world must be faced with different set of principles. The world must, he said, "learn from the past so that never again will there arise a set of factors capable of triggering a similar conflagration".?

The Church herself must learn from the failure of Evangelization that had contributed to the disasters of past twentieth-century Europe, and "be vigilant as to the way the Gospel is proclaimed and lived out today"

b. Philosophical Preparedness and Convictions

Wotyla's strong belief on "objective" human reality had a revolutionary impact on him, even to dropping his earlier philosophical ideas. He came to see that philosophical analysis of reality and its relationship to the moral life he had been taught at the seminary and the Angelicum was inadequate in the contemporary world. Both Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas whom he learnt, had built their philosophies from the foundation of cosmology. But, according to him, starting with such general theory of the universe and moving to a theory of the human person leaves not much room for human freedom, and our modern science has even falsified many of the assumptions these earlier philosophers had made with regard to the universe.

His philosophical outlook then was informed in respect of the realism of the world and human capacity to know it. He believed along with his philosopher-colleagues at the Catholic University of Lublin that if our thoughts and decisions lack a tie to reality, the brute force takes over the world and truth becomes a function of power, not an expression of things-as-they-are. But, for him, and like his colleagues, the starting point

of the reflection should rather than the cosmology as did the ancient and medieval philosophy, be the human person, "a remarkable psychophysical unity, each one a unique person, never again to be repeated in the entire universe.

c. Practical Concern at Vatican II Council

The above personal experience and intellectual convictions that shaped his interest in the human person came clearly to the fore at the Vatican II sessions in which he participated as the bishop of Krakow. It was particularly significant in the drafting of *Gaudium et Spes*.

- Cardinal Congar, a partner with him in drafting *Gaudium et Spes*, noted in his diary the remarkable comments of Bishop Wojtyla at the discussion: "One exclusively considers here" Wojtyla said, "the problems and questions that have arisen from the new situation of the world.... However, the contemporary world also gives some answers to these questions, and it is necessary for us to consider these answers as well, because they conflict with the Church's answers. In the text that has been presented to us, there is no reference to the answers that the contemporary world is offering, and no discussion about the problems that are created because of these conflicting answers. The same desire and concern preoccupied him when he addressed the question of the manner of communication and dialogue with modern culture: It is appropriate that the Council speak in such a way that the world sees we teach not only in an authoritative way, but that we seek together with it a just and balanced solution to the difficult problems of human life. The question is not whether we already know the truth well, but rather how to enable the world to find the truth and make it its own.¹²

Indeed, John Paul I saw eye to eye with Pope John XXIII as Wiegel noted, that "The Roman Curia, the Church's central bureaucracy, had become intellectually ossified and too often identified its own concerns with the needs of the universal Church. Catholicism. had used too much of the medicine of condemnation and too little of the medicine of mercy in its approach to modernity, The Church's theology, its study of Scripture, its worship, and its approach to modern politics all needed development. *¹³

The influence of Wojtyla's contributions in the light of the new approach to the world was such that he was asked to draft the fourth chapter of the first part of *Gaudium et Spes* dealing with

'The Role of the Church in the Modern World'. This document offers a description of the Catholic attitude towards the modern world as one of solidarity with the whole human family. The Council speaks of the Church's responsibility to read the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the gospel. «In language intelligible to every generation», we read, «she should be able to answer the ever-recurring questions which men ask about the meaning of this present life and of the life to come, and how one is related to the other».

In his work, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* John Paul II refers to his participation in the Council debates not only 'as a unique occasion for listening to others, but also for creative thinking'.¹⁴ He appreciated it as a "great gift to the Church, to all those who took part in it, to the entire human family"¹⁵ In an earlier work, he described it as an "act of love", amid the hatred of the age, an effort to "enrich" the faith of the Church so that Christians might live an "increasingly full participation of divine truth"¹⁶ In fact, the Vatican II Council was a profound intellectual experience for Wojtyla and a stimulus for his work as a philosopher. Some of the Church's documents here "nourished his vision of the Church"

Papal Endeavours vis-à-vis the Church and the World

a. On Human Rights

From his life experience, philosophy and deep personal interest in man, it was clear from the beginning of his pontificate that John Paul II was going to renew the world and the Church based on different set of principles founded on Christian humanism (the whole truth about human being). Speaking to the massive crowd of the Mexican city, shortly after his election, he assured them that he has come to represent their voice, "the voice of those who cannot speak or who are silenced" in order to "make up for lost time which is often time of prolonged suffering and unsatisfied hopes".! He blasted immediately the injustices that had warped the lives of the Latin American poor and those responsible for the ongoing oppression of the powerless. "The depressed rural world" he said, "cannot wait any longer for full and effective recognition of his dignity" He insisted that the poor "has the right to be respected..., the right to real help --which is not charity or crumbs of justice - in order that he may have access to the development that his dignity as a man and as a son of God deserves... It is necessary to carry out bold changes... [and] urgent reforms without waiting any longer'.¹⁸

The same year, on October 2, 1979, John Paul gave a public address to the General Assembly of the United Nations at its headquarters in New York. And what he said on human rights was a great challenge to the member Nations with respect to international politics and the pursuit of peace. That was exactly the time of increasing anxiety and political disturbance about the nuclear arms race between East and West. He addressed them as a witness to the truth about "man in his wholeness, in all the fullness and manifold riches of his spiritual and material existence".¹⁹ Politics, he reminded them, is about human beings. Their welfare, and nothing else, is the reason for politics, "whether national or international," because any legitimate politics always "*comes from man, is exercised by man, and is for man.*" Any politics that does not uphold this humanistic criterion has lost much of its reason to exist; it is a politics that has "come to contradict humanity itself".²⁰

Drawing a link between peace and human rights, he told the delegates that respect for the dignity and worth of every human being is what is meant by respect for human rights. Consequently peace is threatened at any occasion there is a politics characterized by the "thirst for power regardless of the needs of others". It exists this way among, as well as within, nations. If national "interest" is stripped of moral components, then

diplomacy is not an honorable business. Peace requires thinking about obligations and duties, not just interests? In the same address, he challenged communism without calling it name by referring to injustices that are deliberately imposed by governments, that attacked human rights, destroyed societies, and thereby threatened the entire international order.

Indeed, it should be remarked that Karol Wojtyla did not come to the papacy with a master plan for dismantling the Soviet Union or its allied empires. "It would never have occurred to him" says Weigel, "to think of his responsibilities in those terms. He was rather determined to give public witness to the truth about the human condition contained in the Gospel of Jesus Christ --and a deliberately evangelical papacy necessarily confronted the counterclaims about human nature, community, and destiny embedded in communism" ²³

It was by fighting for the respect of human rights then, that the Pope helped so much in facilitating transitions from communism to democracy, which till now has been considered the only visible ideology that assured human rights and development. The Church's interest in overthrowing those structures that annihilate human rights was sounded by the Pope when asked by a reporter on his flight to Chile whether the Church in Chile should play the same role as it did in the Philippines' overthrow of Marcos dictatorship. John Paul's response was: "I think it is not only possible but necessary, because this is part of the pastoral mission of the Church". True, it is the wish of some leaders to "separate u from this mission" he said, namely, the Church's defence of basic human rights, however the church will never "let itself die" b giving up the cause of human rights, i.e. "stay in the sacristy and do nothing else." ²⁴

John Paul II's politics have been outstandingly consistent. He entered the world of affairs, not as a diplomat, but as a pastor concerned with the God-given human dignity of each member of the human family. Or, as he expressed his connection with the political world during a flying press conference on his way to South America in 1987, "I am not the evangeliser of democracy. I am the evangeliser of the Gospel. To the Gospel message, of course, belong all the problems of human rights, and if democracy means human rights it also belongs to the message of the Church".? Certainly, what Pope had in mind here is not the *modus vivendi* of the government and the rule of the Autonomous Self when he talked about 'democracy'; rather, it is a democracy that is devoted to the 'truth about man' -a truth which, against the grain of the times, he insists we can know.

b. Strides in Ecumenism

On the commitment to pushing ecumenical endeavours forward, John Paul was also very outstanding. In May 1999, he said in Romania: "I seek unity with all my strength and I will continue to spend myself to the very end for that which is for me the main concern of the Churches". But, not only because it belongs to the Church's task, John Paul II also felt that it is 'either we learn to walk together in peace and harmony, or we drift apart and ruin ourselves and others'? Thus, through his ecumenical effort and papal

pilgrimage to the United Kingdom, he jointly presided over a prayer service with Archbishop Runcie in Canterbury Cathedral, a historic ecumenical first. The Pope and the archbishop signed thereafter, a Common Declaration of Unity, reviewing the ecumenical dialogue since Vatican II and expressing their hopes for the future. The declaration was, arguably the high-water mark in post-Vatican II Anglican-Roman Catholic relations.

Another major ground broken by John Paul in the series of his ecumenical efforts was the signing of a "Common Christological Declaration" with the Assyrian Church of the East, which was long divided from Rome and every other Christian communion at the Council of Ephesus 431. This declaration asserted that Catholics and Assyrians (the Oriental Orthodox Churches) henceforth are "united...in the confession of the same faith in the Son of God" although expressed in different formulas, thus bringing to end a 1,500 year-old dispute between the two ecclesial bodies. There was also this independent American theological initiative where the "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" have developed a joint statement of commitment to public moral renewal and a joint statement of belief about the meaning of salvation, both of which would have been difficult to imagine without the ecumenical witness of John Paul II

The Churches must first seek some form of unity among themselves before they can bridge through the Gospel, the chasm of race, ethnicity, and nationalism that split our divided and dangerous world. That was precisely the aim of the *Ut Unum Sint*, the first ever encyclical dedicated to ecumenism. It insists that if Christians could not repair the unity of the Church, they were poorly positioned to advance the unity of the human race. This was why, in spite of the Orthodox opposition and criticism experienced throughout the 1990s, the Pope continued being resolute that the Orthodox are "sister Churches" with whom the Catholic Church seeks "full unity in legitimate diversity" ² The model for this type of unity, he said, had already been shown, as was lived out in the first millennium. At that time, he stated, quoting the *Oriente Lumen*: "the development of different experiences of ecclesial life did not prevent Christians... from continuing to feel certain that they were at home in any Church, because praise of the one Father, through Christ in the Holy Spirit, rose from them all, in a marvellous variety of languages and melodies... The Councils are an eloquent witness to this enduring unity in diversity."³⁰

In some of the issues that still divide the Churches like the papacy, John Paul even made one of the boldest initiatives proposing that Orthodox and Protestants help him devise the kind of papacy that could serve the need of all. Requesting forgiveness for the painful recollections the exercise of papacy had been marked with human error and sin engendering divisions, he felt a "particular responsibility" to seek common understanding: "heeding the request made of me to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation". ³¹

John Paul II, with extraordinary dynamism, built bridges between peoples, cultures and languages, as well as between Christians and believers in other religions of the World. Through his established Justice and Peace commission, headed by Cardinal Roger

Etchegaray he mediated between nations, explored possibilities of settlement even between two great Islamic nations Iran-Iraq. The cardinal went to most scenes of international or civil conflicts, at the request of John Paul, to represent the Pope's concern for the people involved.³² Although, these missions were primarily to explore quietly the possibility for peace, it was in fact, a politic of "presence" which sometimes did more to bring the two sides to conversation much better than formal diplomacy could. It was a very difficult and risky task, but one that the Pope and his representatives were prepared to take, in order to give the "Church in the modern world" a new kind of presence in some of the most intractable situations of the late twentieth century.

The climax of Pope John Paul II's commitment to build bridges with other faiths was, as Rabbi Alfred Winter also agreed, his role in strengthening the nature of ties between Catholics and Jews, whom he lovingly referred to as "our dearly beloved, elder brothers," a thing which has greatly resonated with Jewry. And while doing this, he insistently condemned anti-Semitism as a sin against God and humanity, and showed profound pain when referring to the Shoah (Holocaust), the unspeakable horror inflicted on six million Jews --many among whom were the friends of his youth --which truly and eloquently bespoke his deep spiritual kinship with the people from whom Jesus came.³³ Given this dramatic initiatives in Catholic -Jewish relations, Catholics and Jews of the twenty-first century, stand now on the edge of a new theological conversation, of the range and depth unimaginable in more than 1,900 years. If the survival of freedom depends on a recognition of the dignity of the human person created by God, then the two communities must deepen their mutual understanding of what it means to be God's elect, called to live as a light to the nations.

c. Youth and the Future

The development of World Youth Day, i.e. the papal encounter with the youth, has today added a new rhythm to the Catholic Church's life. Through this organ, the Pope gave to the world one of the signature initiatives of his pontificate -- 'the World Youth '. This is meant to be the occasion where millions of youth are drawn biennially on pilgrimage to Europe, Latin America, North America, Asia and may be soon, Africa; an event and great heritage which the present Pontiff Pope Benedict XVI has vowed to keep on rolling as Catholic Church's life function.

Youth is a special moment in life, John Paul reminded the youths, because it is the time when an identity and a vocation are formed; the period when at the first serious personal decisions, young people discover themselves made. And as those decisions begin to unfold, they discover themselves as moral actors and face the question of their destiny. Like the rich young man in the Gospel story, young people want to know "what must I do to have eternal life?" (Mt. 19.16, Mk. 10.17, Lk. 18.18). Youth therefore, is a special time to discern a personal future. Discovering one's unique person and task, as John Paul told the youth, is a "fascinating interior undertaking [in which] your humanity develops and grows, while your young personality acquires ever greater inner maturity. You become rooted in that which each of your is, in order to become that which you must become: for yourself --for other people -for God"

At the international World Youth Day, the first ever celebrated in Asia, the world came to record for the first time the largest gathering in human history. That was in Manila in 1995.

According to a Japanese company which used an overhead photography to calculate the number of persons per acre, there was an estimated minimum of 5 million people (some say 7 million).

What happened in Manila was so amazing to the Pope that he confessed to the Philippine ambassador who came to present him her credentials: 'I've never seen so many people in my life'

Another striking encounter among all these meetings, though this time during the International Youth Year, was the gathering with 80,000 Muslim young people at a stadium in Casablanca (Morocco) on the invitation of King Hassan II. The king's positive image about the Pope and his contributions to the world was seen not only by the mere invitation to come and address his young Muslim people, but also in his answer to the Pope who expressing gratitude for the invitation, had nevertheless asked the King what he the Pope could actually do in the officially Islamic kingdom. 35 Hassan's admiration for the Pope was such that through the letter dated 30, December 1983 he legislatively decreed that the Church in Morocco could conduct public worship and religious education and that churches and Catholic schools should be taxfree. The Catholic Church was allowed to enjoy total control over its internal affairs while priests and religious were to be tax-exempt; the Church could receive financial contributions domestically and from abroad and could manage its own finances. Finally, catholic charitable organisations were also permitted

d. The Church and the World of Science

This is the area where the Church has been so badly criticised. Indeed, no incident had done more to sustain the image of the Catholic Church as an enemy of human progress than the seventeenth-century Galileo case, in which the pioneering Florentine scientist was condemned by the Church for holding and teaching Copernicus's theory that the sun, not the earth, was the centre of the solar system. Galileo was held for eight years under house arrest and finally made to recant his heliocentric theory. Since this incident, any little controversy between Catholics and modern intellectual, "Galileo" was sure to be played as a master card, a Joker against the Church. Consequently, the centuries-old rift between the Church and Science had to endure.

However, as the Pontifical Academy of Science celebrated the centenary of Albert Einstein, Pope John Paul II addressed them, and with the desire to better the relation between the two worlds called for a re-examination of the entire Galileo case. He showed no hesitance in praising "the greatness of Galileo" and acknowledged that Galileo "had to suffer a great deal ... at the hands of churchmen and Church institutions." John Paul's hope was that "theologians, scholars, and historians, animated by a spirit of collaboration, will study the Galileo case more deeply and, a loyal recognition of wrongs from whatever side they come, will dispel the mistrust that still opposes, in many minds, a fruitful concord between science and faith...."³⁰

A commission was thus established on July 31, 1981 which concluded its research and handed its reports in 1992, the 350th anniversary of Galileo. John Paul II met with the members of the Pontifical Academy of Science on 31 July 1992 and received the reports of the commission in which its leader Cardinal Paul Poupard submitted that Galileo's judges had not acted rightly.

"Incapable of dissociating faith from an age-old cosmology" Galileo's judges believed sincerely, "that the adoption of the Copernican revolution ... was such as to undermine Catholic tradition, and that it was their duty to forbid its being taught." But they were seriously mistaken by it. "This subjective error of judgment, so clear to us today", the Cardinal maintained, led the judges to a disciplinary measure from which Galileo "had much to suffer", and these mistakes must be frankly recognized.³⁷

Given this report therefore, John Paul II has charged all literary studies, history, biblical interpretation, philosophy, and theology to re-examine their procedures and their age-old assumptions in the light of the Scientific method. On the other hand, science, he maintained, should also reflect things in the light of the developments of the last several centuries. This is because science is not simply a matter of empirical facts. In analysing "the data of experience" and making inferences, scientists have always made use of concepts that were beyond the empirical. Scientists therefore, need philosophers, just as philosophers have come to recognize that they need scientists.

In one of the published conference Papers, the Pope compared the new dialogue he initiated between theology and science to the ecumenical movement. What was thought impossible decades ago was now deemed imperative. Science and theology "have now begun to talk to one another on deeper levels than before, and with greater openness toward one another's perspective... The new dialogue the pope suggested should avoid an imposed and artificial

"disciplinary unity", which had led both science and theology astray in the past. This long delayed dialogue about basic issues, the pope insisted, was essential in revitalizing a humanism capable of shaping a truly human future:

Our knowledge of each other can lead us to be more authentically ourselves. No one can read the history of the past century and not realize that crisis is upon us both. The uses of science have on more than one occasion proven massively destructive, and the reflections on religion have too often been sterile. We need each other to be what we must be, what we are called to be.³⁹

e. Other Achievements

As John Paul II led the Church into the twenty-first century, many historic accomplishments of his pontificate could be identified. But we might not systematically recall them here without touching on, things already said or still to be said. We therefore mention just a few in relation to his imprints on the Catholic Church and the present world Order. They include, among others, the fact that within the first twenty years of his pontificate, the Holy See established diplomatic ties at the ambassadorial level with

sixty-four countries and restored such relations with six others, bringing the total number of countries with whom the she enjoys diplomatic exchange to 168.

Another important milestone of John Paul II was his crucial role in the collapse of European communism. This accomplishment is not understood as an exploit of a clever statesman but an act of a "courageous pastor", who was "determined to speak truth to power and convinced that the word of truth, spoken clearly and forcefully enough, is the most effective tool against the tyranny of totalitarianism. By inspiring the revolution of conscience that made possible the non-violent Revolution of 1989 against Marxism-Leninism, he helped restore the political freedom of his Slavic brethren.⁴⁰

Today, the Catholic Church has a new and powerful presence in the world thanks to John Paul II who has touched consciences in a way that political leaders are unable to do. Such ability to appeal to conscience was papal leadership on the world stage in the twenty-first century, and it is a quality that papal electors may always consider in thinking about papal successions. He demonstrated this skill in many ways, especially in leading the movement for the cancellation of third world debts and calling attention to the case of hunger due to wars between nations and domestic conflicts that leave thousands of children and vulnerable people dead. The Pope made it clear that the principle of non-interference in a country's domestic affairs can no longer apply to such aforementioned circumstances. In his address at the International Conference on Nutrition at UN's headquarter in Rome, he argued: "The conscience of humanity, supported by provisions of international humanitarian law, asks that humanitarian intervention be obligatory where the survival of populations and entire ethnic groups is seriously compromised. This is a duty for nations and the international community...."⁴¹

One other historical landmark and gift of John Paul's pontificate to Catholicism was the preparation and promulgation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the *Depositum Fidei*, as he called it. According to him, it is for "every individual who asks us to give an account of the hope that is in us (cf. 1 Peter 3.15) and who wants to know what the Catholic Church believes".⁴² It does not only offer a comprehensive account of the Catholic faith but serves also as a challenge to some of the dominant intellectual current of the twentieth century like the ideas identified with "postmodernism" and "deconstruction"⁴³

He reshaped the Church's institutional face by his 1988 reorganization of the Roman Curia as well as creating new organs to serve new needs. He reconstructed the papacy not only by the evangelical practice of his pontificate but also by breaking the centuries-old practice of having more Italian electors in the electoral college. Indeed, all these achievements put together, as Weigel summarized them -"the renovated papacy, the full implementation of the Vatican II, the collapse of communism, the clarification of the moral challenges facing the free society, the insertion of ecumenism into the heart of Catholicism, the new dialogue with Judaism, the redefinition of inter-religious dialogue, and the personal inspiration that has changed countless lives",⁴⁴ make it reasonable to state confidently that the pontificate of John Paul II has been the most momentous since the end of sixteenth-century Reformation. And, with regard to the Church's relationship

to the modern world, it is credible to state that Vatican II as authoritatively interpreted by the pontificate of John Paul II has defined the Church's relationship to whatever is coming after "the contemporary world"

It will take volumes to exhaust the historical accomplishments of John Paul II in the life of the Catholic Church and the face-lift he gave to the World, but to stop it at this point would be part of this disrespect to Africa if a word is not said about the Pope's imprint in African continent. This is a continent he has continued to hope in even at a time one American foreign policy analyst recommended that Africa be allowed to fall off the edge of history in a form of international political triage, and a British historian suggested reviving colonialism as the only possible answer to Africa's crisis of crises. His great interest in bringing Africa into the mainstream of the Universal Church and of the world affairs was seen in his call for a Special Assembly of the Synod of African Bishops in Rome, 1994, though his critics continue to charge him for not allowing Africans define their own history and faith-character expression on their own soil.

Indeed, John Paul refused to concede Africa's marginality or hopelessness even as events in Africa darkened its image at the time: then as many missionaries as sixty were killed on the continent in 1997, and the church had to bear a new burden of guilt due to priests involvement in ethnic massacre in Rwanda.⁴⁶ In spite of these, he had to fly to Nigeria in 1998 during Abacha's regime of terror not just only to beatify Nigeria's first candidate to sainthood, Fr. Michael Cyprian Tansi but to denounce the human rights abuses, authoritarianism and corruption of the nation's military junta. He challenged Nigerians to build up a very different society from the one in which they were living and the key to it all was "justice" After that visit, Archbishop John Onaiyekan expressed his sentiments thus: "the visit of the Pope comes to us like a redeeming factor in a situation where we have been having so much bad news".⁴⁷ What can better express the Pope's impact on Africa more than this -- reminding the world that Africa and Africans are significant part of her players in the human drama?

f. Apologies for the Past Errors

The idea of acknowledging the faults committed by representatives or members of the Catholic Church at various times in history had been with John Paul II ever since his election to the papacy in 1978. Few years ago, an Italian journalist Luigi Accattoli published a work titled 'When a Pope Asks Forgiveness,' a book collecting no less than ninety-four declarations of John Paul II expressing sorrow or repentance for corporate sins in which Christians and Catholics have been implicated. In addition to anti-Semitism and the Inquisition, there were other matters such as the Crusades, persecution of the Jews, religious wars, dictatorships, divisions among Christians, discrimination against women, coercion of consciences, colonial oppression, black and Indian slavery, the Mafia, the genocide in Rwanda and resistance to new scientific discoveries etc..

The kingdom of God already present in mystery, the Pope thinks, is obscured by tepidity and infidelity but is made powerfully present by penance and renewal. Thus, as Church stepped into the Great Jubilee, the third Millennium, the Pope thought it wise to purify her of her past scandals, a preparation for a 'new springtime of Christian witness'. In

his apostolic letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* of 1994, the Pope apologized for the part the Catholic Church has played in the disunity among Christians: "It is appropriate that, as the Second Millennium of Christianity draws to a close, the Church should become more fully conscious of the sinfulness of her children, recalling all those times in history when they departed from the spirit of Christ and his Gospel, and, instead of offering to the world the witness of a life inspired by the values of faith, indulged in ways of thinking and acting that were truly forms of counter-witness and scandal."⁴⁸ Both sides in previous disputes (both Catholics and other Christians) were responsible for failures that led to this disunity, and to acknowledge such past errors is an act of honesty that demands courage.

The Pope's own evocations of historical wrongdoing have been instructive. He sometimes calls it the "healing of memories." The height of it was seen during his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, when he cried inside him as he walked slowly toward the eternal flame in Yad Vashem's Hall of Remembrance. In his brief address which he began with Psalm 131 "I have become like a broken vessel... But I trust in you, O Lord" he made a call for silence: "In this place of memories", he said, "the mind and heart and soul feel an extreme need for silence. Silence in which to remember. Silence in which to try to make some sense of the memories, which keep flooding back. Silence because there are no words strong enough to deplore the terrible tragedy of the Shoah."⁴⁹ According to him, the remembrance was "for a purpose, namely, to ensure that never again will evil prevail, as it did for millions of innocent victims of Nazism". And then for the part many Christians had played in that web of evil, he rendered a broken heart of apology on behalf of the Church:

As Bishop of Rome and Successor of the Apostle Peter,
I assure the Jewish people that the Catholic Church,
motivated by the gospel law of love and by no political
considerations, is deeply saddened by the hatred, acts
of persecution, and displays of anti-Semitism directed
against the Jews by Christians at any time and in any place.⁵⁰

In *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* the Pope reminded us that "acknowledging the weaknesses of the past is an act of honesty and courage which helps to strengthen our faith, which alerts us to face today's temptations and challenges."

Critiques

One must recognize that John Paul II had also been a figure of contempt to many Catholic intellectuals. Before the Great Jubilee ushering in the twenty-first century, the man who had been a great 'progressive' hope right from his election in 1978, had gradually turned a target of progressive intellectual animosity. His critics depict him as intellectually repressive. But whatever value this criticism has, it must also take into account the fact that John Paul's pontificate has been one of great theological and philosophical creativity as seen in many of his Encyclicals. Even merely glancing the pages of these texts reveals a far greater openness to modern and contemporary

intellectual methods and insights than had been seen in previous papacies. Certainly, the pope had been very critical of certain fashions in post-conciliar Catholic theology (e.g. liberation theology and some other suspicious theological interpretations) and also philosophy, an attitude which has rendered many catholic intellectuals sad. But only God knows how the future would have judged him if he had given in to such postconciliar theology d'alliance with Marxism for instance, or not challenged the regrettably public effects of philosophy's entrapment in the prison of solipsism. Influenced by a political interpretation of the Vatican II, some intellectuals have often accused John Paul II of being an authoritarian, a centraliser of power who has blocked the

implementation of Second Vatican Council's call for a recovery of collegial responsibility in the Church." In a mild way, they maintained that John Paul's pontificate had geared towards identifying the Church with the papacy with the net result that the initiative of the world's bishops, the priests and laity has been completely diminished. Much as the above criticism is genuine, one must not overlook its theological import along what Hans Urs von Balthasar called the "external reference point" needed for the Church's interior unity. The interior unity of the Church is not ethnic, linguistic or political as obtains in nation-state. The Church's unity is founded on the celebration of the Eucharist in which the Christians participate in union with the saints. Now, as Catholicism grows more ostensibly into a world Church, incorporating the truth it bears in a rich diversity of cultures, it is arguable that the Church has even greater need of a visible, authoritative, external reference point for its unity than in its first two millennia.

It is worthy of note however, that since Vatican II, never had discipline fallen so low among the clergy as it has been experienced in John Paul's pontificate. According to certain writers, statistical evidence show that bad conduct among Roman Catholic priests was no longer considered severe in any terms greater than is the case among clergy of other Christian denominations or among professionals in society. These scandals involving priests were not only evils in themselves, but also constituted barriers to the recruitment and reform within the presbyterate.⁵³ Even Seminaries were not left out in the scandal list. Many voices had signalled the catholic priestly celibacy as the root cause asking for married priests; others have pointed the finger on the authoritarian structure of the Church, requesting for more congregational, less Episcopal (papal) style of leadership and decision making. John Paul attempted to reform the priesthood on the basis of a different judgement based on the conviction that the root cause is found on the Church's sometimes bracing occasional disorienting encounter with modern culture. His remedy which he espoused in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* emphasizes in the main, the intellectual maturity on the side of priests and special period of teaching and formation for the seminaries. While this suggested reform still awaits its fruits and may take longer to realize, the Catholic Church must be concerned about the recurring devastating influence of these scandals and pay attention or give thought to many other fundamental values of our human culture.

Furthermore, while mending fences between science and faith, the Pope argued for a new approach to philosophy and theology among others. In his Encyclical *Fides et Ratio* published in 1999, he sought to give "philosophy a higher profile in Christian

thinking and to free it from its traditional role as 'the handmaid of theology', a term the Pope finds no longer useful, by giving it its own autonomy: philosophy must work by its own rational rules to arrive at the truth. What looks incomprehensible again is how at the end, the truth that the Catholic philosopher would be expected to reach as a result of his/her inquiry must be Catholic truth. Their philosophical discipline, the Pope agreed, should no longer be subordinate to theology, but the answers put forward to life's important questions by theology are superior to those of philosophy, and philosophical dialogue must not lead to a questioning of those answers, still less to different answers altogether.

This attitude can best be described with the favourite phrase which had been used to define his papacy: 'a sign of contradiction'. In his influence on Catholic Church's relationship to the world, his achievement is judged as liberal. But his impact on the Church he leads is considered as conservative, although the Pope himself would probably reject this definition insisting on his own consistency both in his approach to the world and his doctrinal position about the Church. Were the Pope to be right in his own judgement, then his version of consistency does not necessarily match that of the world that is judging him.

Conclusion

There is a Jewish tradition which emphasizes that mankind will be saved on the merits of the "⁵³ Righteous of the World", whose identities are still unknown. It discloses that one of those might be a neighbour, to stress the fact that everyone of us is endowed with the potential to help the world move closer to redemption.

While the identities of these people remain a mystery, nothing stops one from pointing to those who, by virtue of their unshakable willpower, assiduous endeavours and innumerable accomplishments in assisting to achieve the betterment of the human race, should belong that morally and spiritually inspiring "elite" John Paul II.⁵⁴ In his last address to the United Nation's General Assembly on October 5, 1995, the fiftieth anniversary of UN, he assured the delegates and the world that he had come as a "witness to Hope" and that any of them, like himself, had the capacity to wipe away the tears of the world:

We must not be afraid of the future. We must not be afraid of man. It is not accident that we are here. Each and every human person has been created in the "image and likeness" of the One who is the origin of all that is. We have within us the capacities for wisdom and virtue. With these gifts, and with the help of God's grace, we can build in the next century and the next millennium a civilization worthy of the human person, a true culture of freedom. We can and we must do so! And in doing so, we shall see that the tears of this century have prepared the ground for a new springtime of the human spirit.⁵⁵

That new springtime of the human spirit, while no doubt awaits its fullness, has dawned already with as many as 200 million people, who at the pontificate of John Paul II, not just returned to the Catholic Church but were sewn into them the hope of a new world. And, the new freedom being experienced with the collapse of communism, together with the respect for human dignity sensitised in every heart, the world has begun to look like what it is called to be --a true human family/order.

Endnotes

¹ Ratzinger believed that the crucial question for the effective implementation of the Council and for the Church's service to the world was not a matter of redesigning the

Church's international, national, and local bureaucracies. The "crucial question" was "whether there are ... saints who are ready to effect something new and living" (Joseph Ratzinger, "on the Saints of Church and Theology Today", in Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), p.377).

² On this point, Ratzinger reasoned that there was really something unusual which possibly indicates there was something God wants to bring about in his Church. For him, the death of John Paul I called for an examination of conscience:

"What is God's will for us at this

moment? We were convinced that the election [of Luciani] was made in correspondence with the will of God, not simply in a human way ... and if one month after being elected in accordance with the will of God, he died, God had something to say to us." [From the interview conducted by George Weigel with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, September 12, 1996. This is reported in Weigel's book, *Witness to Hope:*

The Biography of Pope John II (New York: Cliff Street Books,

2001), p. 252. I have also relied on this work for a great deal of information).

3. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

4. Archbishop Francis Arinze who had met Wotyla at the Synod of Bishops made the following comments immediately Wotyla was elected: "Now we are going to have a bit of clarity in the Church. We are going to know where we stand, clearly, without being aggressive - but clear." He was convinced that John Paul II was going to put a "positive" face on Catholicism once more (See Weigel, G., *ibid.*, P258)

5. John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery: On the Fiftieth Anniversary of my Priestly Ordination*, London, 1996, pp. 66-67. The same reminiscence of personal tragedy was expressed many years before at one of his pilgrimages to Poland, when speaking to his people after the Mass at his home town Wadowice he remembered those Jewish friends who were lost in the Holocaust: "Nor can I forget that among our classmates in the school of Wadowice and in its high school there were those who belong to the

Mosaic religion; they are no longer with us The Church, and in her peoples and nations, are united with you.

Certainly, first of all your people feel your suffering, your destruction ...then they wanted to speak to the Pope, and the Pope who comes from Poland has a special reason for this because, in a certain way, he experienced all this with you in our homeland." John Paul II, *Spiritual Pilgrimage: Texts on Jews and Judaism 1979-1995*, edited by Eugene

J. Fisher and Leon Klenick (New York: Crossroad, 1995), p. 154. 6.

John Paul II,

7. Ibid., p. 254.

8 Ibid., p. 254ff.

9. Swiezawski, S., "Introduction: Karol Wotyla at the Catholic University of Lublin," in Wotyla, *Person and Community: Selected Essays* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), p. xiii.

10 The Acta Synodalia indicate that he made six contributions to the discussion to this document: III/5, pp. 298-300; pp. 680-683.

11. See, the unpublished diary of Cardinal Yves Congar, OP, *Journal du Concile*, in *Ut Unum Sint*, Bulletin de liaison de la Province de France, 575, November 1994, pp.

180-181.

12. K. Wotyla in Acta Synodalia, III: 5, pp. 298-300.

13. Weigel, G., op. cit., p. 154.

14. Cf. K. Wotyla in Acta Synodalia, III: 5, p. 158.

15. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knof, 1994), p. 157.

16. K. Wotyla, *Sources of Renewal: The Implementation of Vatican II* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), p. 150.

17. John Paul II, *Puebla: A Pilgrimage of Faith* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1979), p. 146.

18. bid.

19. John Paul II, Address to the 34h General Assembly of the United Nations Organization, p.5.

20. Ibid., p. 6.

21. Ibid., p. 9.

22 Ibid., p. 11.

23 Weigel, G., op. cit., p. 281..

24. Robert Suro: "Pope, on Latin Trip, Attacks Pinochet Regime", in *New York Times* (April 1, 1998), p. A1.

25 Ibid., p. A10. Still on the issue of democracy, Pinochet had pressed Pope John Paul II at his Presidential Palace thus: "Why is the Church always talking on democracy? One method of government is as good as the other." To this, the Pope politely replied: "No, the people have a right to their liberties, even if they make mistakes in exercising them." (See G. Weigel's interview with Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Dec. 13, 1996). The Pope did not commend democracy universally without qualification. It is a theme he had to take up again in his exhortation, *Ecclesia in America*, which he promulgated during his visit to Mexico.

It was about the so-called neo-liberal system prevailing in many American countries 'to the detriment of the dignity and respect due to individuals and peoples. the poor are becoming ever more numerous, victims of unjust policies and structures." (See Holmes J. D. & Bickers, B. W, A Short History of the Catholic Church (London: Burns & Oates, 2002), p. 314.

26. See Holmes J. D. & Bickers, B. W., op. cit., pp. 308-309.
27. Cf. Arinze, F, Church in Dialogue (San Francisco: Ignatio Press, 1990), p. 292
28. From "Papal Times:, a supplement of The Catholic Times (June 1, 1997).
29. John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint, 56:1, 57.1 (1995).
30. Ibid., p. 61. The Pope further wrote: "Everyday, I have a growing desire to go over the history of the Churches, in order to write at least a history of our unity and thus return to the time when, after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the Gospel spread to the most varied cultures and a most fruitful exchange which still today is evident in the liturgies of the: Churches" (Orientale Lumen, 18, in L'Osservatore Romano [English], May 3, 1995).
31. Ibid., 95.2
32. Other conflict-wracked areas where the Pope had deployed his representative on mission included Lebanon, Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, Sudan, Namibia, Haiti, Cuba, Indonesia, etc.
33. See Rabbi Alfred Winter: "Pope John Paul II helped to make mankind better", in The Daily Journal (U.S.A. April 7, 2005); Rabbi Winter is a member of Vineland Ministerium, and is the spiritual leader Vineland's Beth Israel Congregation, a member of organization of Jewish federation of Cumberland County. He regards John Paul II as one of the most admirable leaders to grace the face of this earth.
- 34 John Paul II Speaks to Youth at World Day (San Francisco/ Washington, D.C: Ignatius Press/Catholic News Service, 1993).
35. Your Holiness, yours is not only religious responsibility but an educational and moral one as well. I am most happy if you spoke to them about moral standards and relationships affecting individuals, communities, nations, and religions" (See "Historic Meeting in Morocco", September 9, 1985, p. 12. This visit of the Pope became a turning point for the formal relation established between the Holy See and an Islamic State.
- 36 "John Paul II at the Commemoration of Albert Einstein", in L'Osservatore Romano [English edition], Nov. 26, 1997, p. 9.
37. Cardinal Paul Poupard: "Galileo: Report on Papal Commission Findings", in Origins 22:22 (November 12, 1992), pp. 374-375. See also "Galileo, Science and Faith", in Church & Cultures (Bulletin of the Pontifical Council for Culture), no. 18 (1992), pp. 3-4.
- 38 John Paul II: "Lessons of the Galileo Case", in Origins 22:22 (Nov. 12, 1992), pp. 369-379.
- 39 John Paul II: "To the Reverend George V. Coyne, SJ. Director of the Vatican Observatory", in John Paul II on Science and Religion: reflections on the New View

from Rome, ed. Robert John Russel, William R. Stoeger, SJ, SJ. & George V. Coyne, SJ. (Rome: Vatican Observatory Publications, 1990), pp. M2-M14.

40. Weigel, G., op. cit., p. 847. Weigel informed all that while attacking communism, John Paul II simultaneously criticized the widely accepted understandings of the dynamics of history. History, John Paul maintained, is determined by culture at the heart of which is cult. Thus, by lifting the minds of the people against communist tyranny, the pontificate of John Paul II demonstrated in action that Christian conviction can be the agent of human liberation.

41. John Paul II: "The World's Hunger and Humanity's Conscience", in *Origins* 22:28 (December 24, 1992), p. 475. He either went or sent envoys to such places of great concern to draw the world's attention to them. In his address at Kartoum he told them: "which people are weak and poor and defenceless, I must raise my voice on their behalf. When they are homeless and suffering the consequences of drought, famine, disease and the devastations of war, I must be close to them" His visit to them, he said, was on behalf of "justice and peace for all the citizens this land, without reserve, regardless of their religion, social standing, ethnic background or colour." (*The Pope in Sudan: Ceremonies upon Arrivals", in *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition], February 17, 1993), p. 11.

42 John Paul II, *Depositum Fidei*, 3.

About the Postmodernism's claim that plurality is absolute and therefore the impossibility of unity about truth of things over time and culture and the fact that every human being is capable of hearing the saving word of grace from God no matter what his/her cultural or historical circumstances are. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: William H. Sadler Inc., 1994), pp. 173-175.

44. Weigel, G., op. cit., p. 849.

45. See Robert D. Kaplan, *The Ends of the Earth: From Togo to Turkmenistan, from Iran to Cambodia, a Journey to the Frontiers of Anarchy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), • and Paul Johnson: "Wanted: A New Imperialism", in *National Review*, December 14, 1992.

46. See "Two Rwandan Priests Receive Death Penalty", in *National Catholic Register* (April 26 to May 2, 1998).

47. James Rupert: "Nigerians Throng to Papal Mass", in *Washington Post* (March 23, 1998), p. A14.

48. John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 33 (1994).

49. See *L'Osservatore Romano* (English edition] March 29, 200, p. 7.

50. Ibid. An Israel's soldier-intellectual who had called an American friend then in Jerusalem during the papal visit expressed his emotion thus: "I just had to tell you that my wife and I cried throughout the Pope's visit to Yad Vashem. This was wisdom, humaneness, and integrity personified. Nothing was missing. Nothing more needed to be said." (See *Witness to Hope*, p. 873).

51. See Holmes J.D. & Bickers, B.W., op. cit., pp. 301-302. He argues that the Pope insists "on keeping bishops under centralized control, at the cost of losing sight of the collegiality that many saw as a major initiative of Vatican

II."

52. Balthasar, Hans Urs von, *In the Fullness of Faith: On the Centrality of the Distinctively Catholic* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), p. 105.
53. See Philip Jenkins, *Pedophiles and Priests: Autonomy of Contemporary Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
54. Cf. Rabbi Alfred Winter: "Pope John Paul II helped to make mankind better:, in *The Daily Journal* (U.S.A, April 7, 2005).
55. John Paul II: "Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly of the United Nations Organization," 18. The comments that came after this address were all unanimous as to the positive impact of the Pope on the sociopolitical world. The *Wall Street Journal* editorial qualified the speech to the UN as being "no mere collection of sentences." It was rather "an argument ... that makes the innate dignity of the human person the fulcrum of existence - for families, communities, and nations...." (See "The Moral Structure of Freedom', *Wall Street Journal*, October 6, 1995).