



Saint John Paul II



His Holiness John Paul II (16 Oct. 1978-2 April 2005) was the first Slav and the first non-Italian Pope since Hadrian VI. Karol Wojtyła was born on 18 May 1920 at Wadowice, an industrial town south-west of Krakow, Poland. His father was a retired army lieutenant, to whom he became especially close since his mother died when he was still a small boy. In 1938 he moved with his father to Krakow where he entered the Jagiellonian University to study Polish language and literature; as a student he was prominent in amateur dramatics, and was admired for his poems. When the Germans occupied Poland in September 1939, the university was forcibly closed down, although an underground network of studies was maintained. In winter 1940 he was given a labourer's job in a limestone quarry at Zakrów, outside Krakow, and in 1941 was transferred to the water-purification department of the Solway factory in Borek Falecki; these experiences were to inspire some of the more memorable of his later poems. In 1942, after his father's death and after recovering from two near-fatal accidents, he felt the call to the priesthood, began studying theology clandestinely and after the liberation of Poland by the Russian forces in January 1945 was able to rejoin the Jagiellonian University openly. Graduating with distinction in theology in August 1946, he was ordained priest by Cardinal Adam Sapieha, Archbishop of Krakow, on 1 November of the same year. In March 1946 his first collection of poems, *Song of the Hidden God*, was published. Sent by Cardinal Sapieha to the Pontifical University (the Angelicum) in Rome, he obtained his doctorate in June 1948 for a dissertation on the concept of faith in St. John of the Cross. After serving from 1948 to 1951 as a parish priest, he returned to the Jagiellonian to study philosophy. During these years (1952-58) he also lectured on social ethics at Krakow seminary, and in 1956 was appointed Professor of Ethics at Lublin University, becoming acknowledged as one of Poland's foremost ethical thinkers.

On 4 July 1958, while on a canoeing holiday with students, he was appointed titular Bishop of Ombi and auxiliary to the see of Krakow by Pius XII. On 30 December 1963 Paul VI named him Archbishop of Krakow, a role in which he revealed himself as a politically wise and forceful adversary of the repressive Communist government, and on 26 June 1967 made him a Cardinal. He had already published *Love and Responsibility* (1960), a pastoral treatise on the responsibilities of love, including the field of sexuality (1960), and at Vatican Council II (1962-65) he became a prominent figure internationally. A member of the Preparatory Commission, he attended all four sessions and made an influential contribution to the debate on religious freedom, contending that the Church should grant to others the liberty of thought, action, and speech that she claimed for herself. After the Council he was active in implementing its decisions, in Rome as well as in Poland, and attended four of the five general episcopal synods it established; at the 1971 synod he was elected a member of its steering committee. He was also a member of several of the Vatican congregations, or ministries. In the 1960s and 1970s he was becoming a familiar figure on the world stage, repeatedly visiting North America, and travelling to the Middle East, Africa, South and East Asia, and Australia. In Poland he cooperated with his primate, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, in a struggle, which was broadly successful, to secure from the regime some kind of tolerable legal status for the Church. In 1976, at the invitation of Paul VI (who had read his *Love and Responsibility* and used it in drafting *Humanae Vitae*), he delivered the traditional course of Lenten addresses to the Pope and the

papal household (published in English in 1976 as *Sign of Contradiction*). He was thus a well-known and widely respected personality when, at the conclave of October 1978, the Cardinals elected him Pope at the relatively youthful age of fifty-eight.

As with John Paul I, whose name he adopted, there was no coronation: the inauguration of his ministry as 'universal pastor of the Church' took place in St. Peter's Square on 22 October 1978 and his speech was famous for the phrase: 'do not be afraid'. Addressing the Cardinals on 18 October, the new Pope pledged himself 'to promote, with prudent but encouraging action', the fulfilment of Vatican Council II. On 20 October he told the ambassadors that, as he saw it, his role was to be 'the witness of a universal love'; politically the Holy See sought nothing for itself but only that believers might be allowed true freedom of worship. His first Encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis* (Mar. 1979), set out his consistent teaching on human dignity and social justice, and also established the Christological character of his pontificate with his statement that Christ illuminates man for man. His second Encyclical, *Dives in Misericordia* (Dec. 1980), developed related themes, calling on men to show mercy to one another in an increasingly threatened world. On 13 May 1981, while being driven in a jeep in St. Peter's Square, he was shot and seriously wounded by a young Turk, Mehmet Ali Ağca, underwent major surgery, and was convalescent until October 1981. He subsequently visited his would-be assassin in prison and extended his Christian forgiveness to him. In his third Encyclical, *Laborem Exercens* (Sept. 1981), which he revised while recovering, he commemorated the anniversary of Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* and called for a new economic order, neither capitalist nor Marxist but based on the rights of workers and the dignity of labour. Others followed: *Slavorum Apostoli* (June 1985), in commemoration of the eleventh centenary of the evangelising work of St. Cyril and St. Methodius, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, on the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and the world (May 1986); *Redemptoris Mater* (Mar. 1987) on the Blessed Virgin Mary in the life of the pilgrim Church, in preparation for the Marian year; *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (Dec. 1987), expressing concern for the social and international crisis (a work that greatly impressed Mikhail Gorbachev); *Redemptoris Missio* (Dec. 1990) on the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate; *Centesimus Annus* (May Day 1991), denouncing both Marxism, then moving towards eclipse, and consumerist capitalism; *Veritatis Splendor* (Oct. 1993), on certain fundamental questions of the Church's moral teaching and arguing that freedom of conscience cannot be absolute since certain things are inherently evil; *Evangelium Vitae* (Mar. 1995), on the value and inviolability of human life; and *Ut Unum Sint* (May 1995), on commitment to ecumenism. *Fides et Ratio* (15 Oct. 1998), perhaps his most important Encyclical, stressed the distinction between religious awareness and human rationality, but at the same time drew attention to their mutual 'circularity' and 'complementarity'. This interest in the role of philosophy and thought was a natural outcome of his academic and intellectual background which stressed the existence of two orders of knowledge which are distinct but not separate – faith and philosophical knowledge. In this Encyclical he also held up the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas as a leading pathway for the mission of achieving philosophy consonant with faith. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003), John Paul II's last Encyclical, deals with the relationship between the Eucharist and the Church and is a sort of spiritual last will and testament in which all of his spirituality is condensed.

These fourteen Encyclicals were accompanied by important Apostolic Letters dealing with a broad range of issues, such as: *Egregiae Virtutis* (1981), *Caritatis Christi* (1982), *Salvifici Doloris* (Feb. 1984), *Redemptionis Anno* (Apr. 1984), *Les Grands Mystères* (May 1984), *Dilecti Amici* (Mar. 1985), *Euntes in Mundum Universum* (Jan. 1988), *Mulieris Dignitatem* (Sept. 1988), *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (May 1994), *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (Nov. 1994), *Laetamur Magnopere* (Aug. 1997), *Divini Amoris Scientia* (Oct. 1997), *Spes Aedificandi* (Oct. 1999), the *Motu Proprio Misericordia Dei* (May 2002), and *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (Oct. 2002). In addition, John Paul II engaged in the new and more personal form of communication of letters to specific groups in which he offers his participation in their human condition: to families (Feb. 1994), to children (Dec. 1994), to women (June 1995; it may be observed that in the same year Mary Ann Glendon was appointed by John Paul II as the first woman to head a Holy See delegation, in this case to address the fourth UN Conference on women, held in Beijing); to artists (Apr. 1999), and to the elderly (Oct. 1999). Reference should also be made to the five less 'official' books published by John Paul II during his pontificate: *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (Oct. 1994), *Gift and Mystery – on the Fiftieth Anniversary of My Priestly Ordination* (Nov. 1996), *The Poetry of Pope John Paul II Roman Triptych Meditations* (March 2003), *Rise, Let Us Be On Our Way* (May 2004) and *Memory and Identity* (Feb. 2005).

Reaching out to a world in need of a new proclaiming of God and of Christ, another characteristic and highly successful method of the new evangelisation promoted by John Paul II was carefully organised apostolic journeys and pilgrimages by air – an initiative favoured by his command of many languages (including those of Central and Eastern Europe). His first was in January 1979 to open the Latin-American episcopal conference at Puebla, Mexico; his second, from 2 to 10 June 1979, was an epoch-making return to Poland. Since then each year of his pontificate was highlighted by such journeys (104 in total), which emphasised the global mission of the papacy. He was also able to visit over 160 different places in Italy. At the same time, John Paul II, from the

beginning of his pontificate, always devoted much attention to his local duties as Bishop of Rome, visiting 317 of its 333 parishes as well as institutions within the confines of the Eternal City.

In harmony with the ideas and aspirations which were to be expressed in the Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, John Paul II was been very active since the beginning of his pontificate in promoting the ecumenical spirit and developing closer ties with the other Christian Churches and the other religions of the world. Following a visit to Rome's main synagogue in April 1986, he attended the First World Day of Prayer for Peace on 27 October 1986, a meeting of world religious leaders in Assisi. Since the first Assisi meeting, John Paul II received a large number of religious leaders, encounters which were followed by the issuing of joint statements. In addition, on 31 October 1999 the Catholic Church and the World Lutheran Federation signed a 'Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of the Justification' in Augsburg, Germany. In 2001 John Paul II visited a mosque in Syria during his pilgrimage in the footsteps of St. Paul.

During his almost twenty-seven years as Pope, John Paul II held 9 consistories and appointed 231 Cardinals. John Paul II also granted 1166 audiences, and received a large number of world leaders and Heads of State. Such activity was accompanied by the establishment of new diplomatic relations with a number of States. Furthermore, John Paul II has been forthright in his calls for peace at moments of major international crisis. Thus he played a major role in the signing of the treaty on borders between Argentina and Chile in 1984, and was firm in urging the achievement of peace at the time of the Falklands/Malvinas (May 1982), Gulf (Aug. 1990), and Afghanistan (Sept. 2001) wars. History must also record his notable contribution to the demise of the Communist empire in Central and Eastern Europe: the rapturous reaction of the people during his first visit to Poland in 1979 not only exposed the bankruptcy of Communist authority but also had a knock-on effect in other parts of the Soviet regime. Of great historical significance is also the fact that John Paul II was the first Pope to visit both the Polish Parliament (June 1999) and the Italian Parliament (Palazzo Montecitorio, Nov. 2002), where, surveying the history of the Italian people, he underlined their constant commitment towards peace, justice and solidarity. In October 2002, the Holy Father received the 'honorary citizenship' of the City of Rome. Thanking the Mayor, John Paul II said: "The Bishop of Rome feels honoured to be able to repeat today, with particular significance, the Apostle Paul's words, '*Civis romanus sum*'" (cf. *At* 22, 27).

Aware of the holiness of the Catholic Church and of the need for her constant renewal, and eager to stress her spiritual universality, one of the other characteristics of the pontificate of John Paul II was the large number of canonisations (482) and of beatifications (1338) of men and women from various parts of the world and different periods of history. John Paul II also constantly sought close contact with, and devoted great attention to, young people, whom he repeatedly held up as the hope of the Church and mankind.

The Holy Father John Paul II founded the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences in 1994 with the famous *Motu Proprio*. The Academy held its first Plenary Session on 24-26 November 1994. In his address John Paul II spoke as follows: "Appealing to your expertise today, the Church wants to intensify dialogue with researchers in the social sciences for mutual enrichment and to serve the common good". The Pope added: "Epistemology plays an even more essential role for the social sciences than it does for the natural sciences. The same instruments of analysis can be used differently, according to the vision of man they are intended to serve. On the other hand, although the Church expects a great deal from the analyses proposed by the social sciences, she is also convinced that her social teaching can supply the appropriate methodological principles to direct research and to provide useful elements for building a more just and fraternal society, a society which is truly worthy of man". From its first sessions the Academy chose four major topics on which it decided to focus its reflections over the subsequent years: *work and employment*, *democracy*, *intergenerational solidarity* and *globalization*. In his addresses, John Paul II expressed satisfaction that these topics had been selected and gave advice on how they should be approached as they were successively tackled by the Academy. This is not the place to present the procedures chosen by the Academy for its deliberations, except to mention that since the outset it has been agreed that the study of a new topic should always begin with a paper on the current doctrine of the Church on it and that this paper should be used as a point of reference in subsequent interchanges.

John Paul II appointed French economist Edmond Malinvaud as the Academy's first President and also nominated 34 of its members, including: M. Archer, K.J. Arrow, B. Betancur, R. Buttiglione, P.S. Dasgupta, P.-P. Donati, O. Fumagalli Carulli, M.A. Glendon, P. Kirchhof, J.J. Llach, N.J. McNally, R. Minnerath, P. Morandé Court, V. Possenti, J.T. Raga, M.M. Ramirez, K. Ryan, L. Sabourin, H. Schambeck, M. Schooyans, K. Skubiszewski, J. Stiglitz, H. Suchocka, H. Tietmeyer, W.V. Villacorta, B. Vymetalík, H. Zacher, J.B. Zubrzycki, P.M. Zulu. The importance he attached to the Academy was also expressed in the detailed and extensive restoration work carried out to its Renaissance buildings. In February 2004, at the end of Professor Malinvaud's second term, John Paul II appointed Professor Mary Ann Glendon from Boston as President of the PASS. Pope John Paul II was particularly attentive to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences' needs and from the year of its foundation onwards he never missed an audience with its Academicians. During the last, on 30 April 2004, on the PASS' 10th anniversary, John Paul II gave one of his final and most moving speeches on solidarity, one of his favourite themes. The Academy would have liked to offer him the 2005 Plenary Session

on the conceptualization of the human person, a topic so close to the Holy Father's heart, but Providence had other plans.

An assessment of John Paul II's imposing pastoral action was made by His Holiness Benedict XVI in his first message to the Church and to the world on 20 April 2005: 'Pope John Paul II leaves a Church that is more courageous, freer, more youthful. She is a Church which, in accordance with his teaching and example, looks serenely at the past and is not afraid of the future. With the Great Jubilee she entered the new millennium, bearing the Gospel, applied to today's world through the authoritative rereading of the Second Vatican Council. Pope John Paul II rightly pointed out the Council as a "compass" by which to take our bearings in the vast ocean of the third millennium'.