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# TAKING DOWN COMMUNISM FROM WITHIN

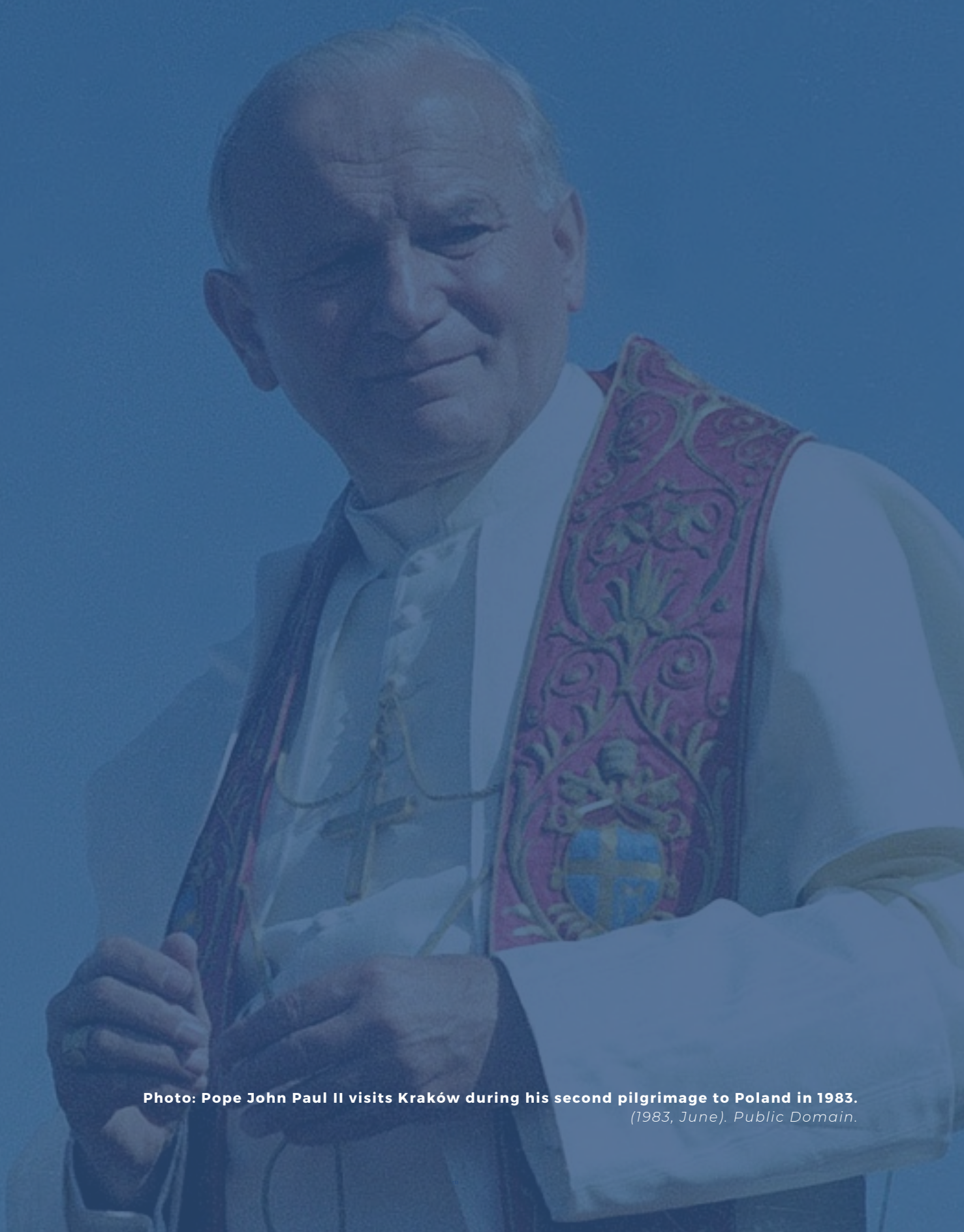
How John Paul II Fought Communism by Restoring  
Human Dignity and Renewing a Lost Hope

A VOC Report by Agnes Tycner



VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM  
MEMORIAL FOUNDATION™





**Photo: Pope John Paul II visits Kraków during his second pilgrimage to Poland in 1983.**  
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# Table of Contents

Introduction	1
<b>Part 1: Lessons of the Past</b>	
Chapter 1: John Paul II's Philosophy on Why Communism is Incompatible with the Human Soul and Innate Human Nature	3
Chapter 2: Who was John Paul II?	41
Chapter 3: The Impact of John Paul II's 1979 Pilgrimage	60
Chapter 4: John Paul II and Ronald Reagan Join Forces	81
<b>Part 2: History Repeats Itself</b>	
Chapter 5: A Case Study on Ukraine: Russian Totalitarianism Continues	100
Chapter 6: A Case Study on China: A Country Still Battling with Religious Freedom	106
Chapter 7: Concerning Totalitarian Parallels Emerging in American Society Today	114
Chapter 8: Conclusion and Moving Forward: How can we use John Paul II's Message for the Challenges of Today?	129
Bibliography	132

# About the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation

The Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation (VOC) is an educational, research, and human rights nonprofit organization devoted to commemorating the more than 100 million people killed by communism around the world and to pursuing the freedom of those still living under totalitarian regimes.

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VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM  
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## Introduction

Fighting communism “from within” means recognizing that communism as a social and economic system does not consider the human person. When Marx was drafting *The Communist Manifesto*, he did not have human nature nor human spirituality in mind. For Marx, every human problem could be solved solely through economics and material goods. John Paul II knew that human beings were called to be something greater than an instrument in an endless means of production. People were not to be valued in an economic sense, but as they were created in God’s image, *imago Dei*.

Having lived through two totalitarian regimes, John Paul II witnessed firsthand the danger of disregarding human life and the dignity of the human person. Throughout his life, he made it his mission to restore the meaning of human dignity and human rights, which the Nazi and Soviet regimes had so brutally altered and destroyed. In this way, he fought communism by fearlessly proclaiming the truth about man and explaining the proper human anthropology. Man cannot be treated as a means, but always to an end. Furthermore, John Paul II brought to light the importance that faith, freedom, family, human dignity, and meaningful labor have in each person’s life.

These messages in his homilies, encyclicals, and public speeches first brought hope to his homeland, Poland, which was shackled under atheistic communist rule for 44 years. During his 1979 pilgrimage, his words awakened a lost hope among Poles and gave them the courage to create the first free labor union in the communist bloc, Solidarity (*Solidarność*). The efforts of the Solidarity Movement eventually led to the end of communism in Poland. Even with John Paul II’s example and encouragement, however, Solidarity couldn’t take down communism alone. The downfall of the “Evil Empire” was accomplished through a combined effort: of other religious influences, such as Stefan Wyszyński and Henryk Jankowski and the Catholic Church as an institution; the commitment of political figures, such as Ronald Reagan and Lech Wałęsa; and a strong allyship with the United States. Combined with desperate economic conditions, these factors collectively brought communism to its downfall. Still, it was John Paul II and Poland that marked the beginning of the end of Soviet communism.

The example set by the Poles ignited a revolution that spread throughout the rest of Central and Eastern Europe. Eventually, John Paul II’s message of “Be not afraid,” which first mobilized Poles, was heard by nations all over the world as John Paul II visited 129 countries during his papacy. He earned his title, “Pope of the People,” because of his mission to become a universal church leader, his various excursions around the world, and his ability to speak multiple languages. John Paul II also believed it was important for his mission to extend outside of the Catholic Church, and to connect or repair relations with all faiths. He established the “World Day for Peace,” was the first pope to visit a mosque and pray with Muslims, and was the first pope to make an official visit to a synagogue.

In an increasingly polarized society, John Paul II's example of unity is needed more today than ever before. Concerning totalitarian tendencies that have begun emerging in America and the West have only furthered this divide between citizens. In addition to this soft totalitarianism, support for socialism and communism is on the rise. This all signals that the fight for freedom, human dignity, and religious liberty continues today, not only in the West, but also in nations such as China, Ukraine, North Korea, Venezuela, and others. Increasingly in today's world, leaders tethered to the truth are needed. One does not, however, need to be a major figure like John Paul II to make a change. It is enough to know his message and follow his peaceful, yet assertive example. The former pope teaches both Catholics and non-Catholics alike to overcome violence with peace, evil with good, and fear with faith.

Above all, Pope John Paul II is remembered as a leader who fought for the dignity of the human person and human rights across the globe. By proclaiming the truth about man and using his influence to force political change, he helped take down the evil ideology that abolished all of man's freedoms. By design, communism is in conflict with human nature, and requires the formation of a new person in order to create the ideal Marxist society. When John Paul II preached and wrote about human nature as God intended it, he provided hope to people and reminded them of their value. As a result, he removed the fear and loneliness that many people felt in their hearts. This newfound hope encouraged people to no longer live under the façade of the regime and to begin organizing themselves, eventually sparking permanent change. The fall of communism within Poland, let alone Europe, could have ended violently or lingered on for decades more without John Paul II's courage, example, and leadership.

## Part 1: Lessons of the Past

### **Chapter 1: John Paul II's Philosophy on Why Communism is Incompatible with the Human Soul and Innate Human Nature**

*When debating the workings of communism or socialism, one often hears about the economics or politics of the system; however, little time is devoted to discussing the spiritual side of communism or, rather, the lack thereof. This is critical to consider, since communism largely failed because of its poor understanding of human beings, human nature, and human spirituality. Communism did not allow for freedom of religion, but treated human beings as mere objects in the means of production. It suppressed human creativity, and ultimately believed that any human problem could be solved by economic means alone. John Paul II knew that people were not meant to live to serve the Communist State and believed that each person had a divine purpose ordained by God. In his books, homilies, encyclicals, and public speeches, he sought to bring awareness to the world about the Marxist ideology's fatal flaws by discussing human dignity and human nature as God intended. Through his various works, John Paul II was able to explain the proper value of human life, freedom, religion, work, private property, the family, and how a communist system directly opposed and destroyed these rights and values. He sought to remind people that the Church was the true advocate for human rights, and not the "people's party," which consistently denied these inalienable human rights. This chapter explains how John Paul II took down communism, which was not by attacking the communists directly, but rather by restoring the human dignity and human spirituality in people that had been brutally robbed of them. Further, this chapter introduces John Paul II's socioeconomic perspective, which reveals the proper conditions for a free, virtuous society and human flourishing.*

#### **The Error of Communism Lies in Misunderstanding the Human Person**

In accordance with the Judeo-Christian view, John Paul II recognized that communism does not provide the conditions that allow human beings to live out life as they were called to by God. When Marx was drafting *The Communist Manifesto*, he did not have human spirituality or human nature in mind. Communism makes major false assumptions about human nature and the human person, proving why the system has never, and will never work in practice. The main problem with the communist system is that it calls for the dismantling of human nature and for the creation of a "New Man," or as coined in the Soviet Union, a *Homo Sovieticus*. This "New Man" (or "New Woman") is subjected to conform to the ideals of Marxism, to become a person who ultimately does not have his own identity. Marx believed that human nature could be altered, and that people become products of their environment. The creation of a new person would eventually be necessary because human beings as they are designed by God, or as they are



in their present nature, cannot thrive to their highest potential under a communist system. Ultimately, the creation of a new society would result in the creation of a new person. Leonid Ilyichev, a leading Soviet ideologist, was quoted stating:

The Party considers the education of the new man the most difficult task in the communist transformation of society. Unless we uproot the moral principles of the bourgeois world, educate people in the spirit of communist morality, and spiritually regenerate man, it is not possible to build a communist society.<sup>1</sup>

The formation of a new man by this re-education cannot come about without repression and force. Accordingly, a Communist State controls not only all the means of production, but virtually every aspect of a person's life, from his education and career, to what he is allowed to say and the news outlets he can get information from, as well as smaller details such as when hot water is available, what clothing is being sold, and other things of this nature. This is all controlled so that man cannot think or act in a way that is against the communist regime. All those who oppose are punished or killed accordingly. Gulags, execution lines, and gas chambers are all a feature of the communist system. The rest of the population lives in fear and in a state of forced obedience. Even when the State cannot spiritually regenerate man or successfully create this new man, the elites can at least attempt to control him. A person who is constantly living in a state of fear will often not challenge authority. Most people aspire to live a peaceful life and avoid being put into a concentration camp; however, even in this "peace" man still becomes a prisoner. His conscience is replaced with the conscience of the collective, and his ways must align with those of the communist elites.<sup>2</sup>

When Soviet dissident Vladimir Bukovsky was asked how many political prisoners remained in the Soviet Union, he replied, "280 million. Everybody in the Soviet Union is a political prisoner. The guard who kept me in prison, he was a political prisoner because he had to deny the truth. They all have to obey a lie."<sup>3</sup> Every day people had to lie to themselves and to their families about reality. Freedom, human consciousness, and basic human rights are so suppressed in a communist society, that every person is forced to conform to the ways of the government and live behind a communist façade. As a result, the objective of everyday life becomes survival, with no hope of a better future. When this freedom to think and to act is taken away, man is denied his most basic human rights. John Paul II often reminded his followers, "Man is called to freedom." This is the underlying weakness of communism: the removal of freedom, the condition that makes a man who he is.

Contrary to what today's world typically constitutes as freedom, John Paul II did not define freedom as the ability to do whatever one wants, nor is freedom "simply the absence of tyranny

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<sup>1</sup> Klaus Bockmühl, "The Marxist New Man," *Christianity Today*, December 5, 1975, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1975/december-5/current-religious-thought.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Stefan Wyszyński, *Love & Social Justice: Reflections on Society*, trans. Filip Mazurczak (Warsaw, Poland: Pallontinum Publishing House, 1993), 242.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Kengor and Robert Orlando, *The Divine Plan* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2019), 55.



or oppression.”<sup>4</sup> He explained freedom as having a certain logic to it “which distinguishes it and ennobles it: freedom is ordered to the truth and is fulfilled in man's quest for truth and in man's living in the truth.”<sup>5</sup> Truth and freedom are found together. As stated by John Paul II and philosophers before him, “there is no freedom without truth.” God is the source of truth, and truth is all things according to God’s word. Further, there is only one universal truth, and it is the singular objective reality each person lives in. The truth is not relative. John Paul II further explains what freedom entails: “To live the truth of what we are and who we are before God, the truth of our identity as children of God, as brothers and sisters in common humanity.”<sup>6</sup> This means that living in the truth and in real freedom can only occur when one lives according to God’s plan. God created the universe by His design, therefore His law and plan for life is ultimately “the truth,” and will provide the most prosperity for all people.

Real freedom is achieved when a person chooses to align himself further with the responsibilities the Author of Life gives each person, which are all things that are right, just, good, beautiful, truthful, moral, and the like. Thus, freedom means living life responsibly in accordance with God’s will, which calls each person to make the choice to pursue the good consistently. Simply put, real freedom means pursuing the good responsibly, again and again. Pope John Paul II puts it this way: “Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.”<sup>7</sup> He reminds his people that it is not enough to say, “I am free,” but rather, “I am responsible.” Ultimately, “Responsibility is the necessary culmination and fulfillment of freedom.”<sup>8</sup> Freedom can truly be free only when it is tethered to the truth and responsibility.

John Paul II lived under two totalitarian regimes and witnessed firsthand what it meant to live in a society where freedom was denied—where there was no absolute truth, society was controlled by fear, and the dignity of the human person was degraded. He recognized early on that “the remarkable brutality of the twentieth century stemmed from a refusal to recognize the inherent value of the human person made in the image and likeness of God.”<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, he believed that the government should never impose upon a person’s God-given, inalienable rights. Instead, the job of the government is to protect the dignity of the human person and his freedoms, so that it is possible for each person to lead a meaningful life. As political scientist Thomas Rourke states, “The government should by no means ‘prevent a person from acting according to the demands of conscience,’ nor should it have the ability ‘to deny people their right

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<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, “Apostolic Journey to the United States of America: Address of His Holiness John Paul II,” The Holy See, October 5, 1995, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1995/october/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_05101995\\_address-to-uno.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1995/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_05101995_address-to-uno.html).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, “Meeting with the President of the United States of America, Mr. Ronald Reagan,” The Holy See, September 9, 1987, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1987/september/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19870910\\_reagan-museo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1987/september/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19870910_reagan-museo.html).

<sup>7</sup> John Paul II, “Apostolic Journey to the United States of America: Eucharistic Celebration in Oriole Park at Camden Yards,” The Holy See, October 8, 1995, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1995/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19951008\\_baltimore.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19951008_baltimore.html).

<sup>8</sup> George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2020), 165.

<sup>9</sup> Kengor and Orlando, *The Divine Plan*, 43.

to responsible personhood.”<sup>10</sup> John Paul II was a leader who sought to remind people that no matter how much the communist regime infringes on one’s freedom and value, each person has an intrinsic worth given by God that can never be taken away. It was critical to remind people that they have value, purpose, and ultimately an eternal destiny. In this way, John Paul II fought communism “from within.”

Through his various homilies, encyclicals, speeches, and writings, John Paul II was able to explain the true value of the human person, the importance of freedom in all aspects of life, the value of meaningful labor, the right to private property, and the value of the family, among other topics. By properly explaining these rights and values from the Judeo-Christian and Catholic perspectives, he was able to point out the logical fallacies in Marx’s work and the errors of the communist system. Ultimately, human beings were never designed to live under Marxism because no authority has the power to change the human person, to deny human nature, or to deprive human beings of their freedom. To deny men their most basic human rights of acting and thinking is to deny men the life they were called to. Marx got the human anthropology wrong, and John Paul II recognized this. No authority that claimed to be the true liberator of people would ever put the dignity of the State over the dignity of its citizens. He saw that the Church’s doctrine of the dignity of the human person would strike at the Achilles’ heel of the Polish Communist regime and the communist system as a whole.<sup>11</sup> John Paul II made it his mission, both before and during his papacy, to restore human dignity, human rights, and renew the human spirit that atheistic communism took away. His message reminded people that God is the true source of a person’s rights and freedoms, not the State.

## **The First Fatal Flaw of Communism: The Elimination of God and Suppression of Religion**

### **Man’s Spiritual Nature**

The first error that Marx made in opposition to the human person was trying to create a world without God. The denial of God is where the disrespect for the dignity of the human person begins. This is because God is “the supreme guarantor of human dignity and human rights.”<sup>12</sup> The elimination of God will accordingly cause something else to take God’s place. When there is no God, men invent their own god, whether they are conscious of it or not. In the Marxist model, “the State becomes the provider, sustainer, protector, and lawgiver for every citizen; in short, the State is viewed as God.”<sup>13</sup> Every action a person takes is intended for the betterment of the State and the collective. As stated by Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, “In the communist system, man has sacrificed his humanity in favor of the State.”<sup>14</sup> In effect, the State pushes the narrative that through economic well-being, every problem in society and in life can be solved. However, men

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>12</sup> John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Conversations at the Dawn of a Millenium* (New York, NY: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 2005), 144.

<sup>13</sup> “Is Marxism Compatible with the Christian Faith?” GotQuestions.org, April 25, 2016, <https://www.gotquestions.org/Marxism-Christian.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Wyszyński, 241.

cannot be satisfied solely through improved economic conditions, nor “by bread alone.”<sup>15</sup> Marx wrongly believed that once the economic problems were solved, the human problem would also be solved.<sup>16</sup> In other words, once the material needs (money, shelter, belongings, etc.) of man were met, every personal need (happiness, esteem, self-actualization, etc.) would accordingly be fulfilled.

Pope Pius XI (1857-1939) was an early voice who pointed out the communist goal of achieving material happiness in his encyclical *Divini Redemptoris*: “[Communism] would have only one mission: the production of material things by means of collective labor, so that the goods of this world might be enjoyed in a paradise where each would ‘give according to his powers’ and would ‘receive according to his needs.’” Money, property, material goods, and economics become the focus of life in a Communist-Marxist utopia. Marx did not see the need for religion or God, because he believed the promised, ideal life heaven offered could be realized on earth. In his view, religion was created only to offer a console to “the oppressed and exploited by offering them in heaven what they are denied upon earth.”<sup>17</sup> If a paradise on earth could be created, man would not need to pray to the heavens for a better afterlife. As a result, the need for religion would naturally dissipate.

John Paul II reminds the world that material goods and wealth are not the answer to human misery. Furthermore, its abundance will ultimately fail to create “something closer to heaven on earth.”<sup>18</sup> It is obvious that Marx did not have a spiritual understanding of human beings, nor did he realize that humans desire more than economic well-being and material goods. Augustine stated himself, “There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man which cannot be satisfied by any created thing but only by God the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ.” Paul Kengor further paraphrases Augustine: “We all have a God-shaped vacuum that God alone can fill; not a dollar-signed vacuum.”<sup>19</sup> John Paul II recognized man as a spiritual being whose life is to be lived out both in spirit and the flesh. In a speech to university students in Mexico in 1978, and again to students in Kraków in 1979, John Paul II explains the necessity of nurturing the spirit: “Man must not be reduced to the sphere of his merely material needs. Progress cannot be measured by economic categories alone. The spiritual dimension of the human being must be given its right place.”<sup>20</sup> He further explains in his first published book, *Love and Responsibility*, that humans are different from any other creature on earth precisely because of their spiritual nature:

A person differs from a thing in structure and in the degree of perfection. To the structure of the person belongs an “inner” in which we find the elements of spiritual life and it is this that

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Kengor, *The Devil and Karl Marx* (Gastonia, NC: TAN Books, 2020), 157.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>17</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, “Marxism and Religion,” *Church Life Journal*, January 25, 2019, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/marxism-and-religion/>.

<sup>18</sup> Kengor, *Devil*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> John Paul II, “To University Students,” The Holy See, June 8, 1979, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/june/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19790608\\_polonia-cracovia-universitari.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19790608_polonia-cracovia-universitari.html).

compels us to acknowledge the spiritual nature of the human soul and the peculiar perfectibility of the human person.<sup>21</sup>

Atheistic communism did not recognize that people have a transcendent element nor any “purposes apart from temporal ones.”<sup>22</sup> John Paul II taught that when the right to pursue God is suppressed and man’s spiritual being is denied, man is denied who he is as a person. This is because with human dignity comes a personal “moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth.”<sup>23</sup> Father Thomas D. Williams, LC explains that John Paul II believed that “religion was the forefront of man’s greatest destiny, called to be in communion with his creator, to know God, to know why he’s here on earth.”<sup>24</sup> However, atheistic communism suppresses the fundamental right of freedom to religion and the freedom to aim toward God. Without directly addressing the communists, John Paul II explains in his encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* how religious suppression in communism ultimately makes atheism the default:

[The] curtailment of the religious freedom of individuals and communities is not only a painful experience, but it is above all an attack on man's very dignity. . . [It is] a radical injustice with regard to what is particularly deep in man, what is authentically human. . . [A]theism as a human phenomenon is understood only in relation to the phenomenon of religion and faith. It is therefore difficult. . . to accept a position that gives only atheism the right of citizenship in public and social life, while believers are. . . barely tolerated or are treated as second-class citizens or are even – and this has already happened – entirely deprived of the rights of citizenship.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, John Paul II declared that “religious freedom. . . is the basis of all other freedoms and is inseparably tied to them all by reason of that very dignity which is the human person.”<sup>26</sup> He further defines religious freedom as, “the right to live in the truth of one’s faith and in conformity with one’s transcendent dignity as a person.”<sup>27</sup> Religious freedom is the first freedom required to understand human dignity, because it is necessary to be free to seek God and, ultimately, to understand the human person. Without religious freedom, society fails to be a place that is truly human. Furthermore, only with religion and with God can man begin to understand what the truth is and what freedom really entails. Understanding these abstract concepts sets one free, because only then can one begin to understand oneself and other people

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<sup>21</sup> John Paul II, *Love and Responsibility* (London: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1981), 121.

<sup>22</sup> Wyszynski, 51.

<sup>23</sup> Paul VI, *Dignitatis Humanae* [Encyclical Letter on Religious Freedom], The Holy See, December 7, 1965, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651207\\_dignitatis-humanae\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html).

<sup>24</sup> Kevin Knoblock, “Nine Days That Changed the World,” 2021, video, 1:34:43, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W5EiTKciWYQ>.

<sup>25</sup> John Paul II. *Redemptor Hominis*. The Holy See. March 4, 1979, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_04031979\\_redemptor-hominis.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html).

<sup>26</sup> John Paul II, “Message of John Paul II to the Secretary General of the United Nations,” The Holy See, December 1, 1978, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/pont\\_messages/1978/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19781202\\_segretario-onu.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/pont_messages/1978/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19781202_segretario-onu.html).

<sup>27</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* [Encyclical Letter on the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*], The Holy See, May 1, 1991, sec. 47, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_01051991\\_centesimus-annus.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html).



better. John Paul II further explains the importance of this human right to faith from the Catholic perspective in this excerpt during his 1979 homily in Warsaw at Victory Square:

For man cannot be fully understood without Christ. Or rather, man is incapable of understanding himself fully without Christ. He cannot understand who he is, nor what his true dignity is, nor what his vocation is, nor what his final end is. He cannot understand any of this without Christ. Therefore, Christ cannot be kept out of the history of man in any part of the globe, at any longitude or latitude of geography. The exclusion of Christ from the history of man is an act against man.<sup>28</sup>

During the World Day of Peace in 1985, he delivered a similar message declaring that in order to know exactly what “makes up the dignity and the greatness of a human being” a person must first come to know God.<sup>29</sup> He states:

Who is your God? We cannot define our notion of man without defining an Absolute, a fullness of truth, of beauty and of goodness by which we allow our lives to be guided. Thus, it is true that a human being, “the visible image of the invisible God,” cannot answer the question about who he or she is without at the same time declaring who his or her God is.<sup>30</sup>

### **Religious Freedom is More than Just Religious Tolerance: What Exactly Does Religious Freedom Entail?**

From a more theological perspective, the following statements made by John Paul II signify that to deny man Christ, or a relationship with God, is to ultimately deny man himself. John Paul II describes in his encyclical *Centesimus Annus* the effect atheistic communism made upon man: “the spiritual void brought by atheism, which deprived the younger generations of a sense of direction and in many cases led them, in the irrepressible search for personal identity and for the meaning of life, to rediscover the religious roots of their national cultures, and to rediscover the person of Christ himself as the existentially adequate response to the desire in every human heart for goodness, truth and life.”<sup>31</sup> Essentially, man needs God to make sense of who he is: his life, his purpose, and ultimately, his eternal destiny.

Furthermore, as highlighted in *Redemptoris Hominis*, one’s human dignity cannot be fully understood without reference to God the Father. This is because each person was made in *imago Dei*, the image and likeness of God. During the drafting of the Second Vatican Council, Cardinal Wojtyła worked extensively on *Gaudium et Spes*, in which he explains that “no one brings human dignity and freedom into clearer light than the Eternal Son of God who assumed our humanity, united himself in a certain way with each person, and called each person, even those

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<sup>28</sup> John Paul II, “Homily of His Holiness John Paul II,” The Holy See, June 1, 1979, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19790602\\_polonia-varsavia.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790602_polonia-varsavia.html).

<sup>29</sup> John Paul II, “XVIII World Day for Peace 1985: Peace and Youth Go Forward Together,” The Holy See, December 7, 1984, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19841208\\_xviii-world-day-for-peace.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19841208_xviii-world-day-for-peace.html).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, sec. 24.

who do not yet know his Name, to freely embrace His Father's love."<sup>32</sup> In effect, "Christ is united to every man and woman who ever lived or will live."<sup>33</sup> So, when a person encounters another person, they are encountering Christ, regardless of background, religion, race, status, or creed. This is why Saint John Paul II believed that society has an obligation to protect the human rights of all people throughout the whole world, starting with religious freedom. Denying a man his right to praise God threatens both his autonomy and his freedom to aspire to the truth. Sharing this truth about life is essential to man's destiny.

This theological understanding of religious freedom is necessary to understand John Paul II's perspective because without it he found the definition of it to be "partial and inadequate."<sup>34</sup> He believed that when the definition of religious freedom is intended to be "immunity from external coercion in the practice of religion" then it "corresponds to the notion of religious tolerance rather than freedom."<sup>35</sup> Any idea of religious freedom is incomplete without an understanding of how it corresponds to the dignity of the human person and each person's union or relationship with God. This theological perspective helps solidify why religious freedom is an inalienable human right, and why revelation is needed to understand religious freedom completely. Pope Paul VI (1897-1978) provides the final definition of religious freedom in *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Declaration on Religious Freedom:

This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits. The council further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself. (2) This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, religious freedom is both the freedom to practice without coercion and the acknowledgment that it is essential for discovering man's dignity. During the drafting of *Dignitatis Humanae*, John Paul II urged that the document specify "religious freedom as a matter of God's revealed will for the world and for human beings."<sup>37</sup> In addition, he sought to clarify religious freedom not only from the theological perspective for the faithful, but also from the perspective of reason, to appeal to non-believers as well. Thus, *Dignitatis Humanae* also argues

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<sup>32</sup> William E. Lori, "Blessed John Paul II: Champion of Religious Freedom," Knights of Columbus, April 27, 2011, <https://www.kofc.org/en/news-room/articles/national-catholic-prayer.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Avery Dulles, "John Paul II on Religious Freedom," *Humanitas*, October 26, 2000, <http://www.humanitasreview.com/publications/30-magisterium/24-john-paul-ii-on-religious-freedom>.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Paul VI, *Dignitatis Humanae* [Encyclical Letter on Religious Freedom], The Holy See, December 7, 1965, sec. 2, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651207\\_dignitatis-humanae\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html).

<sup>37</sup> Weigel, *Witness*, 165.

“from the point of view of natural law, that is to say from a ‘purely human’ position, on the basis of the premises given by man’s own experience, his reason, and his sense of human dignity.”<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, religious freedom cannot truly be declared “free” unless it is a person’s choice that is pursued freely and willingly chosen, for only then is it real and true. John Paul II agreed that God is rightly worshipped only when a person makes the decision to do so without coercion. Therefore, as important as it is to protect religious freedom, it is equally as important for the Church not to force her truth upon the unwilling. This has not always been the case regarding the Church, and John Paul II recognized this.

During the celebration of the Great Jubilee year 2000, John Paul II made “penance for sins of violence committed in the name of religion” a major theme.<sup>39</sup> He writes, “Another painful chapter of history to which the sons and daughters of the Church must return with a spirit of repentance is that of the acquiescence given, especially in recent centuries, to intolerance and even the use of violence in the service of truth. From these painful moments of the past a lesson can be drawn for the future, leading all Christians to adhere faithfully to the sublime principle stated by the council: ‘The truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it wins over the mind with both gentleness and power.’”<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, “Man’s response to God in faith must be free: no one therefore is to be forced to embrace the Christian faith against his own will.”<sup>41</sup> John Paul II was one of the first Catholic leaders to show public reconciliation.

### **Religious Freedom on a Personal and Community Basis**

Lastly, religious freedom has both personal and community aspects. John Paul II thoroughly explains these conditions for religious freedom in his letter to the heads of state who participated in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. On a personal level, religious freedom constitutes: freedom not to be forced to join a particular religion; freedom to pray and worship individually and in a community, in both private and public; the right to have/build churches and places of worship; the right to educational and religious resources; the freedom for parents to educate their children in their faith without incurring extra costs; the freedom for people to “receive religious assistance,” regardless of location; the right not to be forced to act in a way that would be contrary to their morals and values; and the freedom from discrimination in public settings (profession, school, civic responsibilities, etc.) based on religious beliefs.<sup>42</sup>

On a community level he writes of the following requirements: freedom to choose the “internal hierarchy” or “equivalent ministers” in one’s religion; freedom for religious leaders to freely exercise their ministry; freedom of religious training; freedom to publish religious texts;

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<sup>38</sup> Dulles, op. cit.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* [Apostolic Letter on Preparation for the Year of Jubilee 2000], The Holy See, November 10, 1994, sec. 35, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1994/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_19941110\\_tertio-millennio-adveniente.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19941110_tertio-millennio-adveniente.html).

<sup>41</sup> Paul VI, *Dignitas Humanae*, sec. 10.

<sup>42</sup> John Paul II, “Message of John Paul II on the Value and Content of Freedom of Conscience and of Religion,” The Holy See, November 13, 1980, sec. 4, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1980/november/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19801114\\_atto-helsinki.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1980/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19801114_atto-helsinki.html).

freedom to communicate the faith by “spoken or the written word, inside as well as outside places of worship”; freedom to use media to spread religious word; and freedom to participate in charity events and social activities to show care for the poor.<sup>43</sup> John Paul II was able to identify these concepts so precisely because he knew what it meant to live in a society that suppressed religious freedom. He incorporated many of these points during his participation in the Second Vatican Council, where the Declaration of Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, was drafted.

### **Ramifications of a Lack of Religious Freedom**

If the role of the Church is to be a leader for the faithful, it is vital for the State to first guarantee the right to religious freedom. Unfortunately, freedom of religion has rarely been respected in communist countries. Under communism, the State often does not recognize religious communities as valid in the first place. As a default, atheism becomes the only accepted practice. For example, in communist Poland, priests and religious clergy were constantly executed or sent to labor camps, believers were harassed, religious symbols were destroyed, access to holy sacraments was denied, masses were interrupted, land for churches was confiscated, the amount of paper churches could use for publications was limited, and seminarians were subject to forced labor or military service. In the Soviet Union, Russian Orthodox bishops and priests were executed and imprisoned, Muslim communities and Buddhist monks were targeted, a five-day calendar was introduced to eliminate days of worship for believers, houses of worship were destroyed, and schools were indoctrinated with scientific atheism. In present-day China, all party members are forced to espouse atheism, Turkic Muslims are sent to re-education camps and are also subjected to forced labor and surveillance, Tibetan Buddhist monks are regularly arrested or imprisoned, and the Falun Gong spiritual movement is banned while its adherents are subjected to possible detention and forced organ harvesting. The examples listed are only a few of the instances in communist history and present-day societies where Marx’s vision of an atheist society was or is currently being attempted. They ultimately show that without the cooperation of the State, religious “freedom” cannot exist.

In John Paul II’s message to the heads of state who participated in the Helsinki Final Act, in which he described the essential elements of religious freedom, he quoted *Dignitatis Humanae*: “The practice of religion by its very nature consists primarily of those voluntary and free internal acts by which a human being directly sets his course towards God. No merely human power can either command or prohibit acts of this kind.”<sup>44</sup> So, it should not be within the power of the State to control any aspect of a person’s religious beliefs, nor should the State make the conditions of practicing so difficult that it becomes virtually impossible to do so. John Paul II would make it his mission to teach the world that religious freedom as it was declared in *Dignitatis Humanae* was a fundamental human right and “an essential requirement of the dignity

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., sec. 3.



of every person.”<sup>45</sup> Many faiths proclaim that a relationship with one’s creator is necessary to lead a fulfilling life. Therefore, no regime should have the right to suppress that choice to aspire toward God, nor can they control people’s souls. Without faith and without God, human beings cannot answer the deeper questions of life, nor begin to understand themselves or their destinies. Even if a person is not a believer, he should at least have this choice to say no and discover the truth on his own. John Paul II asserts the importance of free will in spiritual development: “Each individual has the right and duty to seek the truth, and, on the other hand, other persons as well as civil society have the corresponding duty to respect the free spiritual development of each person.”<sup>46</sup>

When looking throughout history, one can see that Marxism proved that human spirituality ultimately cannot be suppressed, and people will continue to long for a deeper meaning and purpose. As John Paul II writes in *Centesimus Annus*, “Marxism had promised to uproot the need for God from the human heart, but the results have shown that it is not possible to succeed in this without throwing the heart into turmoil.”<sup>47</sup> Marx did not consider the transcendent element of each person, nor man’s purposes “apart from temporal ones” here on earth.<sup>48</sup> Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński writes, “Experience shows that even if we fully achieve the perfection of earthly life, temporal aims are not capable of satisfying all the desires of the human soul, which is much richer in its aspirations.”<sup>49</sup> This rejection of the human spirit is seen precisely in the case of Nowa Huta, a city that was modeled to be an atheistic communist utopia, but ultimately failed to become one.

## The Case of Nowa Huta

Even if an authoritarian government manages to suppress religion, human nature was ultimately designed by God to be satisfied only by Him. Therefore, people will still desire to “worship, assemble for religious instruction, and have a place for prayer and devotionals,”<sup>50</sup> even when all these elements are taken away from them. This is precisely what happened in the city of Nowa Huta, a city located outside of Kraków that was built by the communists to become the ultimate “workers’ city” or “worker’s paradise.” Nowa Huta literally translates to mean “The New Steel Mill.” This city was designed to model the communist utopia and was purposely constructed on the outskirts of Kraków in an effort to replace Kraków, a city that was “the intellectual and cultural center of Poland,” with a “better” city that was “a prototypical city of workers, an embodiment of communist ideology.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> William D Montalbano, “John Paul Defends Freedom of Religion as Fundamental Right,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 1987, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1987-12-16-mn-19662-story.html>.

<sup>46</sup> John Paul II, “Freedom of Conscience and of Religion,” sec. 2.

<sup>47</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, sec. 24.

<sup>48</sup> Wyszyński, 55.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Jeffrey F. Kirby, “A Young John Paul II Taught Us Life without Spirit Isn’t Fully Human,” *Crux*, October 29, 2017, <https://cruxnow.com/commentary/2017/10/young-john-paul-ii-taught-us-life-without-spirit-isnt-fully-human>.

<sup>51</sup> “Bishop Karol Wojtyła and the Cross at Nowa Huta,” 2021, video, 11:01, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=memP18o8yT0>.

Accordingly, Nowa Huta was built to encompass rows of Stalinist apartment buildings, milk bars, wide streets, underground bunkers and tunnels, and most importantly the famous steel mill, the Tadeusz Sendzimir Steelworks, originally known as Vladimir Lenin Steelworks. Everything from hospitals to schools and libraries was planned in the construction of Nowa Huta; however, one structure purposely was left out: places of worship. The intention was to create “the first communist city without God.”<sup>52</sup> Here the communist authorities could test out their dream of creating a population of people who were *Homo Sovieticus*, a term used to describe people who would conform to the morals and ideals of the Soviet Union. This “New Soviet Man” would not be bound to his Polish identity, tradition, culture, or faith but to the ways of Marxism. The communist authorities believed that inhabitants should “give up the old Catholic worldview” and find all their purpose in their daily work and contributions made to the city.<sup>53</sup> Reality would show that the residents of Nowa Huta still desired more to life than work and demanded that a church should be built in the city.

At the time, the people of Nowa Huta did not realize how difficult and long the process of receiving permission to build a church would be. In October of 1956, the authorities reluctantly agreed to have a church built in the city square. Residents quickly placed a large wooden cross on the square to mark where the construction of the new church would be. For the time being, “the square became the center of the city’s religious life.”<sup>54</sup> Although the townspeople hoped it would be a temporary place of worship until the construction of the church was complete, the square itself became the people’s meeting point for years. Masses would be held at the square, and prayer groups would gather around the wooden cross for fellowship. On the morning of April 27, 1960, the authorities had enough of this worship and ordered groups of workers to tear down the cross. What was deemed to be a simple task erupted into a bloody, multi-day protest between civilians and the police. Thousands were injured, hundreds were arrested, and some were even subjected to prison sentences ranging from 6 months to 5 years in length.

The civilian sacrifice did not come in vain, for the cross that the communists wanted to remove remained standing; however, they now declared that a school should be built instead, next to the cross on the original grounds for the church. The permit that was issued in 1956 for building the church was rescinded by 1962. Undaunted, Karol Wojtyła, a young bishop at this time, continued to push forward for a church. Nowa Huta belonged to Bishop Wojtyła’s jurisdiction. Out of both duty and desire, Wojtyła became a driving force in responding to the request of the people for a church. He was involved in frequent meetings with the authorities to discuss the reissuing of a building permit, while also committing himself to be a spiritual leader for the residents of Nowa Huta. He would join the other priests in the square by the cross and even “gave sermons in the open field, winter and summer, under a burning sun, in freezing rain and snow.”<sup>55</sup> Beginning in 1959, Wojtyła celebrated midnight mass for thousands of faithful in

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Jane Barnes and Helen Whitney, “John Paul II and the Fall of Communism,” PBS, 2014, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/pope/communism/#:~:text=Meanwhile%2C%20Bishop%20Wojtyla%20and%20other,was%20supposed%20to%20be%20built.>

an open field, every Christmas, year after year. A cross was placed in the field to recognize the area as a place of worship. The communists would repeatedly pull the cross out of the ground, and the workers would accordingly put it back each time. This debacle went on, back and forth, for many years.

Although it took years of praying, demonstrating, and arguing with the authorities, Wojtyła's mission finally prospered. In 1967, the authorities granted permission to build a church. Volunteer workers assembled and constructed the church themselves, usually after a day of working a full shift. Finally, in May of 1977, about 20 years after the first permit was issued and one year before Wojtyła became Pope, the Church of Our Lady, Queen of Poland, also known as *Arka Pana*, or *The Lord's Ark*, was consecrated by Wojtyła. The story of Nowa Huta shows how the communists cannot remove the spiritual nature of human beings, even when they eliminate God from public life. When creating the "New Soviet Man," they didn't account for "the very personhood of those persons."<sup>56</sup> Life is lived out in both spirit and the flesh. If life can be fulfilled by material means and economics, as the theory of communism seems to conclude, then "one would imagine that belief in God or a desire for worship would have faded away, especially under a system known to silence or punish such expressions."<sup>57</sup> Instead, worship and faith proved to be a necessity. Evidently, cultivating the soul is just as important as satisfying earthly aims in our personal and professional lives. Saint Augustine makes this point in his *Confessions*: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee."

In the case of Nowa Huta, as with all countries past and present which fought or currently fight for religious freedom, it is critical to recall these words that John Paul II proclaimed to the people of communist Cuba:

When the Church demands religious freedom, she is not asking for a gift, a privilege or a permission dependent on contingent situations, political strategies or the will of the authorities. Rather she demands the effective recognition of an inalienable human right. It is not a matter of a right belonging to the Church as an institution; it is also a matter of a right belonging to every person and every people.<sup>58</sup>

In conclusion, religious freedom is the basis for all human rights, and the foundation that should be laid down first in order to understand the human person and human dignity. It is God who is the supreme holder and creator of human rights and dignity. The knowledge of God and the freedom to practice religion are critical to possess if a person is to know himself and live his life according to his highest aim. No authority, State, or political figure should have the power to suppress this right and freedom. As stated by Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, man has the right to build his life "in accordance with his own aims and purpose of that life."<sup>59</sup> If man's strongest aspiration is God, and his ultimate aim is to serve God, then man cannot be denied this right to aspire towards God. This message is repeated in *Dignitatis Humanae*: "The practice of religion

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<sup>56</sup> Kirby, op. cit.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Dulles, op. cit.

<sup>59</sup> Wyszyński, 68.

of its very nature consists primarily of those voluntary and free internal acts by which a human being directly sets his course towards God. No merely human power can either command or prohibit acts of this kind.”<sup>60</sup>

In his first encyclical, *Redemptoris Hominis*, John Paul notes that God is the highest aim in life for various religions, “though the routes taken may be different, there is but a single goal to which is directed the deepest aspiration of the human spirit as expressed in its quest for God.”<sup>61</sup> Marx did not understand the human spirit, nor did he consider this essential part of human beings when drafting his *Manifesto*. Ultimately, the lack of religious freedom is the first fatal flaw of Marxism, for the elimination of God will inevitably create a dysfunctional society based on no absolute truth, which will eventually lead to the degradation of the human person. John Paul II confirms this: “The denial of God deprives the person of his foundation, and consequently leads to a reorganization of the social order without reference to the person's dignity and responsibility.”<sup>62</sup> When people in society are not clear about the human identity, the value of every human person becomes based on each individual's interpretation. A society built on relativism cannot be a place for human freedom or human flourishing, because a person's identity or value should not be subject to individual interpretation. There is only one moral and absolute truth in this world, and it is based upon natural law, the eternal law of God.

### **Marx's Troubled Life and Despairing View on Religion**

The struggle for religious freedom in communist societies raises the question of where this determination to eliminate religion and God originated. One quickly discovers that communism was atheistic in nature because its founder was. To better understand the communist ideology, it is critical to examine the man who formulated it. Who Marx was as a person undoubtedly influenced the workings of *The Communist Manifesto*. Before even drafting his *Manifesto*, Marx was an outspoken atheist who often criticized religion, Christianity in particular. Marx's writings reveal a troubled man who desired a revolution because of the unhappiness and struggles he felt in his personal life. As Aristotle notes, “Men start revolutionary changes for reasons connected with their private lives.”<sup>63</sup> His various letters, essays, poems, and books contain dark quotes such as, “Blessed is he who has no family,” and “The social principles of Christianity preach cowardice, self-contempt, abasement, submission, humility.” One of his poems chillingly states, “Thus Heaven I've forfeited, / I know it full well. / My soul, once true to God, / Is chosen for Hell.”<sup>64</sup>

His writing also revealed that he was a racist and anti-Semite. Marx often disparaged his Cuban son-in-law, Paul Lafaruge, and would refer to Lafaruge as “Negrilla” and “The Gorilla.”<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, in Marx's essay *On the Jewish Question*, he states, “Money is the jealous god of

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<sup>60</sup> Paul VI, *Dignitatis Humanae*, sec. 3.

<sup>61</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, sec. 11.

<sup>62</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, sec. 13.

<sup>63</sup> Kengor, *The Devil*, 33.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 90, 29, 51.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.



Israel before whom no other god may exist...The bill of exchange is the actual god of the Jew. His god is only an illusory bill of exchange.”<sup>66</sup> These verses are only brief extracts of the crude things Marx and Engels share about race and Judaism in their writings. One can only imagine what they likely discussed in private and what state of mind they must have been in to put these things in writing. Ultimately, this hatred they felt in their hearts transferred into hate against people, God, and religion, which later was reflected in the pages of the *Manifesto*.

In one of his most famous writings regarding religion, Marx states, “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.”<sup>67</sup> This quote shows how Marx believed that religion was nothing more than an ideology created by men who were weak and needed it in order to survive the hardships of life. He compares religion to the opium of the people because, like an opiate drug, it provides temporary relief from suffering and pain. On the contrary, to follow God is in fact quite the opposite. From the perspective of Christianity, to wake up every day and “pick up one’s cross,” choose between evil and good, and be ridiculed for what one believes in is not an easy task. Other faiths contain similar challenges and hardships.

Marx declared his intolerance for religion in various other works. He states in one piece, translated by Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, “Communism begins where atheism begins.”<sup>68</sup> Further, Marx and Engels write in the *Manifesto*, “Communism abolishes eternal truths, it abolishes all religion, and all morality.” Unfortunately, his disgruntlement doesn’t stop there. Marx continues:

The first requisite for the happiness of the people is the abolition of religion.

The criticism of Religion is the beginning of all criticism.

The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of men, is a demand for their real happiness. The call to abandon their illusions is a call to abandon a condition which requires illusions.<sup>69</sup>

This ideology had no tolerance for any faith, whether Christianity, Judaism, Islam, or Buddhism. Marx desired a world without a trace of any religion and without God. Communism is atheistic in its nature and incompatible with religion because Marx himself lived an atheistic life. As Bishop Fulton J. Sheen writes in *The Church, Communism and Democracy*, “Marx was not first a Communist and then an atheist. He was first an atheist, then a Communist. Communism was merely the political expression of his atheism.”<sup>70</sup> The ideology he created reflected his internal beliefs.

Marx believed that the only reason religion existed was because of the oppressive conditions present in society. Once a communist society was established and people were no longer

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 107, 26, 27, 24.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 46.

oppressed and exploited, a superficial faith would no longer be necessary. He anticipated that religion would just naturally dissipate after the creation of heaven on earth. What Marx forgot to consider was that there will always remain a “hunger of the soul” that cannot be satisfied until “it rests in the Lord and His love.”<sup>71</sup> Poland’s Primate of the Millennium, Stefan Wyszyński, explains that even in this communist utopia where everyone is “supplied with bread and liberated from the burden of work,” man will still not be “completely liberated from [the] evil and suffering” that is found on earth.<sup>72</sup> Marx blamed the problems of the world on the capitalist system without realizing that human beings are complex individuals. In addition to faith, often the solution to the troubles people face can be found within themselves, not in an “ideal” socio-economic system. Even if Marx tried to create a world without God, he could not remove the reality of the world created by God, including human nature.

Furthermore, all of Marx’s followers such as Lenin, Stalin, and Mao also had a deep intolerance for religion. They established societies where organized religion was extremely difficult to practice, if not outlawed completely. Thus, Lenin writes in his essay, “The Attitude of the Workers’ Party to Religion,” what he believed religion was truly used for: “All modern religions and churches, all and of every kind of religious organizations are always considered by Marxism as the organs of bourgeois reaction, used for the protection of the exploitation and the stupefaction of the working class.”<sup>73</sup>

The right to worship has always been, and continues to be today, one of the greatest obstacles when living under a communist government. For communists, religion is a competing ideological enemy that does not allow for the total state control of society. Essentially, faith in God means communists cannot control “the body, mind, and spirit of man.”<sup>74</sup> In order for Marxism to reach its full potential, communists need complete control of the human person and cannot have any competing ideologies. Religion is seen as competition because it provides people with values, morals, and virtues such as hope, courage, strength, and perseverance to prosper. If people are aimed at the moral good and have hope, they cannot become tainted or corrupted, as communism often requires of people. In addition, religion offers an avenue for people to think for themselves, and ultimately reminds people that their true meaning in life cannot be found in economic fulfillment alone.

Faith and God’s love fulfill man’s needs in a way that a communist utopia never could, and never will. These reasons are precisely why communist governments throughout history always deem it necessary to suppress freedom of religion. From Lenin to Stalin, Pol Pot to Castro, “Religion was the enemy, a rival to Marxist mind control.”<sup>75</sup> Atheism was the necessary key for the Marxist revolution to take place, so that the human person could exist solely to serve the State and not God. Therefore, the first step in restoring the human dignity of the person was to

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<sup>71</sup> Wyszyński, 327.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 327.

<sup>73</sup> Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “Lenin: The Attitude of the Workers’ Party to Religion,” Marxist Archive, 1973 accessed October 6, 2023, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1909/may/13.htm>.

<sup>74</sup> Kengor, *The Devil*, 108.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 127.

restore religious freedom, which the world saw John Paul II fearlessly proclaim time and time again.

## **The Second Fatal Flaw of Communism: The Devaluation of the Human Person & Human Labor**

### **John Paul II's Solution for Broken Socio-Economic Systems**

The role of the Catholic Church is not to comment on economic or political technicalities, nor should she establish what the ideal economic, social, or political systems are, but rather the Church's role is to guide and develop the people who will be running the economic, social, and political systems. The Church ultimately seeks a socioeconomic solution that allows for human flourishing and upholds human dignity. Furthermore, since the needs of people and society are ever-changing, the social and economic models should be adapted to the particular circumstances of the times and guided by moral law. John Paul II's best-developed social encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, published in 1991, provides a moral framework that social communities should follow so that citizens are living in just conditions and can develop themselves to their highest potential. He provides a social and economic framework that ultimately does not “cut itself off from the truth about man.”<sup>76</sup>

John Paul II's economic and social thought was greatly shaped by his experience of living in communist Poland, as well as by witnessing the errors of Europe's bureaucratic welfare system, exploitative capitalism, and Latin America's mercantilist tendencies. John Paul II's “way” is based on the Catholic Church's social doctrine, which aspires to maintain a free and virtuous society composed of a democratic political community, a free economy, and a robust moral culture. Wojtyła offers a solution to the broken social-economic systems of the past which ultimately failed because they did not uphold the dignity of the human person nor of human labor. The ideal social and economic orders must align with human nature in order to produce the right conditions for human flourishing.

### **The Condition of Workers: An Introduction to *Centesimus Annus***

*Centesimus Annus* is largely a continuation and response to Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, which addressed the “social question,” also known as the “condition of workers.” During the time of Pope Leo XIII, industrialization had only recently begun. It was difficult navigating a world where capital was the “new form of property” and “labor for wages” was the new form of labor.<sup>77</sup> In the midst of this new production structure was a disregard for the human person and the family. Pope Leo XIII's encyclical above all focuses on the correct view of the human person and speaks on how to protect the dignity of the worker under these new, industrialized conditions.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, sec. 4.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. sec. 4.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

*Rerum Novarum* translates from Latin to mean “Of New Things” while *Centesimus Annus* stands for “New Things, One Hundred Years Later.” Leo XIII addressed the radical changes in the economic and social systems of the time, what John Paul II referred to as “the conflict between capital and labor.”<sup>79</sup> Although during Pope Leo XIII’s time, the Church’s “right and duty was far from being commonly admitted,” his encyclical established a social model for the Church to follow and set an example for future popes. The Church was beginning to have a voice in public life and finally could “spread her social doctrine.”<sup>80</sup>

Pope Leo XIII believed that the conflict found between capital and labor was exacerbated by the following elements: “Progress in industry, the development of new trades, the changing relationship between employers and workers, the enormous wealth of a few as opposed to the poverty of the many, the increasing self-reliance of the workers and their closer association with each other, as well as notable decline in morality.”<sup>81</sup> All of these factors resulted in economic, social, and political systems where people were being treated as objects and as mere means to an end. Pope Leo XIII took it upon himself to address the dignity of work and the worker, a theme which John Paul II would later take up in his 1981 encyclical *Laborem Exercens*.

Leo XIII begins with affirming the “natural human right” to establish trade unions, not “in order to surrender to a class mentality,” but rather because “the rights of association is a natural right of the human being.” Pope Leo also establishes the following rights that belong to workers: “limitation of working hours, the right to legitimate rest and the right of children and women to be treated differently with regard to the type and duration of work.” Often sex and age were not considered when assigning work in factories and other establishments. Pope Leo stressed that a worker’s capabilities must be proportionate to the given assignment or task. Further, the resting time a person is granted must align with the work they put in and be “proportionate to the wear and tear of one’s strength.”<sup>82</sup> Among these conditions is the rightful assumption that the workplace will be an environment of cleanliness and hygiene. Workers should, moreover, be awarded a “just wage” that is sufficient to support themselves and their families. Further, “the State does not have the power to intervene in the terms of these contracts,” nor can employers coerce workers to take on a contract with harder conditions because of “fear of a worse evil” or out of necessity.<sup>83</sup> Man must work knowing he has enough to provide for his family and should never be forced into an unethical situation for his work. Lastly, Pope Leo concludes that the working class should be given their “Sunday rest” so that they reflect not only on earthly things but on the things of the next life. As each person has a duty to worship God, the freedom to respect each worker’s religion must be upheld.

All these rights lead to the overarching theme of Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum*, “the correct view of the human person.” Man is different from all other creation because “‘man is the only creature on earth which God willed for Himself.’ God has imprinted his own image and

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., sec. 5.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., sec. 5.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., sec. 5.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., sec. 7.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., sec. 8.



likeness on man (cf. Gen 1:26), conferring upon him an incomparable dignity...In effect, beyond the rights which man acquires by his own work, there exist rights which do not correspond to any work he performs, but which flow from his essential dignity as a person.”<sup>84</sup> Due to man’s inherent dignity, as John Paul II writes in his first published book, *Love and Responsibility*, “Nobody can use a person as a means towards an end, no human being, nor yet God the Creator.”<sup>85</sup> This condition must be reflected in every society’s economic, political, and social systems. When society’s structures are not aligned with the human person, there can be no human freedom and flourishing.

## **Devaluation of the Human Person**

Communism introduces a social and economic system which devalues the human person more greatly than under other political ideology. When the role of God is replaced with the State, man inevitably loses his value and dignity as a human person. As John Paul II explains in *Centesimus Annus*, “The denial of God deprives the person of his foundation, and consequently leads to a reorganization of the social order without reference to the person’s dignity and responsibility.”<sup>86</sup> In Marxism, the social order is restructured so that a person’s rights are subordinate to the State and the elite who rule. Martin Luther King, Jr. warned of the dangers of what happens in communism when a person becomes reduced to an “object” or “means” to serve the State in one of his sermons: “If any man’s so-called rights or liberties stand in the way of that end, they are simply swept aside. His liberties of press or pulpit expression, his freedom to vote, his freedom to listen to what news he likes or to choose his books and even his friendships are all restricted. Man has to be a servant, dutiful and submissive, of the State, and the State is omnipotent and supreme.”<sup>87</sup> In addition, there are no proper rules of law nor checks and balances in communist societies to fight any of these injustices.

In effect, the only way a Marxist society can keep control of society from going against the elite is through control and force. As witnessed in various communist societies this always includes the use of violence, coercion, and even death or torture if necessary. John Paul II further proclaims in *Centesimus Annus*, “When people think they possess the secret of a perfect social organization which makes evil impossible, they also think that they can use any means, including violence and deceit, in order to bring that organization into being.”<sup>88</sup> John Paul II’s words align perfectly with those of Martin Luther King, Jr.: “For the Communist, there is no Divine government, no absolute moral order, there are no fixed, immutable principles. Force, violence, murder, and lying are all justifiable means to the millennial end.” To the communists, a human being is not a person with value and purpose, but rather a tool to be used for the greater good of

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., sec. 11.

<sup>85</sup> John Paul II, *Love and Responsibility* (London, England: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1981), 27.

<sup>86</sup> *Centesimus Annus*, sec. 13.

<sup>87</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “My Pilgrimage to Non-Violence,” Stanford University, The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, August 9, 1953, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/my-pilgrimage-nonviolence>.

<sup>88</sup> *Centesimus Annus*, sec. 25.

the State. Accordingly, they can use any means, including murder, to achieve their vision of utopia. In communist systems, if a person cannot be dominated, he must be eliminated.

Lastly, it is important to recognize that the devaluation of the human person comes from Marxism's foundation and solution, which lies in economics. Under communism, man's aim in life becomes production for the good of the State and the collective, to ensure the overall increase in economic well-being for society. Marx believed all of a person's problems could be solved by developing the right economic model to secure prosperity and equality. In order to create this just and equal society, Marx's economic model required that the State own all the means of production, as well as property rights. John Paul II, however, warns in *Centesimus Annus* about the negative effects of State ownership: "State control of the means of production... would reduce every citizen to being a 'cog' in the State machine."<sup>89</sup> Through State control, man loses his individual rights, dignity, and personal responsibility. Through serving the State and the collective, man is reduced to an instrument in the means of production and is treated as a means to an end. The value of a human person becomes based on what a person can produce and what that person can provide for the State. Furthermore, the State controls all cultural centers and academic institutions, such that a person is also forbidden to develop himself intellectually.

### **A Person can Never be a Means to an End**

*"Work may not be treated – anywhere or ever – as a commodity, because man may not be a commodity to man."* -- John Paul II's homily to workers in Gdańsk, June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1987

Unfortunately, becoming an object and not the subject of work is a danger in both socialism and communism, as well as in unregulated forms of capitalism. In all of these systems, labor becomes abused because man is no longer the purpose of the work. Work must be "for man" and man cannot be "for work." John Paul II recognizes the danger of using a person as an object or a "means to an end" and writes about it in *Love and Responsibility*. Although focusing on love and human relationships, the book provides valuable insights into the human person, which can be applied to the way systems such as communism value people.

While man is both subject and object, he is never a thing, he is always a somebody. That means when he is an object he retains his own unique quality, or personhood.

A person must not be merely the means to an end for another person.

If God intends to direct man towards certain goals, he allows them to begin to know those goals, so that he may make them his own and strive towards them independently.

Anyone who treats a person as the means to an end does violence to the very essence of the other, to what constitutes its natural right. Obviously, we must demand from a person, as a

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., sec. 15.

thinking individual, that his or her ends should be genuinely good, since the pursuit of evil ends is contrary to the rational nature of the person.<sup>90</sup>

It is the right of a human being to be treated with God-given dignity and not to be used as an object by other people for their own ends. God already bestowed His value when he created each person in *imago Dei*, His own image and likeness. Therefore, a person's value does not come from the work they provide, but simply from who they are. John Paul II argues that in Marxist-Leninist forms of totalitarianism, people are respected only "to the extent that they can be exploited for selfish ends [of the State]."<sup>91</sup> As cited above, people are reduced to being nothing but "a 'cog' in the State machine."<sup>92</sup> This results from the fact that totalitarianism's root problem is found in the "denial of the transcendent dignity of the human person," which ultimately stems from the denial of God.<sup>93</sup> When the dignity of the human person is denied and people are only valued based on what they can provide for the State, then their lives become subordinate to the needs and goals of the State.

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński further describes the devaluation of the human person in the communist system: "What is man to communism? Man is by no means an important concept... Man is only a means of production... The entirety of man's worth is measured by his productive potential, which becomes the measure of all human rights. The entire system of production has sought to devalue the concept of "man," deprive man of freedom, and intentionally destroy human dignity through the system of labor competition."<sup>94</sup>

### **John Paul II's Perspective on Labor: Analyzing *Laborem Exercens* <sup>95</sup>**

John Paul II did not explicitly state that he was a proponent of a specific economic system, nor did he often comment on economics in general. Rather, he followed Catholic social doctrine and endorsed an economic system that allowed for the best possibility of human flourishing and upheld human dignity. He states that it is not the Church's place to comment on political developments, nor on consequences of societal changes, but that "the Church considers it her task always to call attention to the dignity and rights of those who work, to condemn situations in which that dignity and those rights are violated, and to... ensure authentic progress by man and society."<sup>96</sup> A proper economic and social system that assures just conditions and rightfully rewards each person for their labor is critical, since work makes up the majority of man's life.

*Laborem Exercens* addresses the relationship between man and work as it was designed to be. He recognizes the importance labor holds in each person's life, but only in the context

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<sup>90</sup> John Paul II, *Love and Responsibility*, 21, 26, 27.

<sup>91</sup> *Centesimus Annus*, sec. 44.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 15.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Wyszyński, 240-241.

<sup>95</sup> John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* [Encyclical Letter on Human Labor], The Holy See, September 14, 1981, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091981\\_laborem-exercens.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html).

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, sec 1.

where “work is ‘for man’ and not man ‘for work.’”<sup>97</sup> As communist and socialist societies have exemplified in the past, as well as unregulated and early forms of capitalism, man cannot be treated “on the same level as the whole complex of the material means of production, as an instrument and not in accordance with the true dignity of his work.” Instead, man “ought to be treated as the effective subject of work and its true maker and creator.”<sup>98</sup> If man does not hold dominion over his work, he risks losing his dignity. Unfortunately, history, and even present times, have shown that this condition is not always upheld.

John Paul’s *Laborem Exercens* begins by emphasizing that man is called to work. Labor is a human right and one of man’s ultimate duties while he is here on earth. The Bible instructs man to subdue and dominate the earth in his own way, whether that is through agriculture, physical labor, service, healthcare work, motherhood, research, intellectual contributions, or various other means. Each of these avenues allows man to “fill the earth and subdue it” according to his specific vocation. John Paul II states, “Work, in its many forms, both intellectual and manual, is necessary for man to fulfill the magnificent mission that the Creator has entrusted to him.”<sup>99</sup> Man should never produce simply for the aim and sake of production. Furthermore, all the resources of the earth are meant for man to discover and use for his own ends in accordance with his chosen vocation. God gave man all of these resources, so that man could nurture the earth, improve it, and make it “his own.” As a result of his efforts, “man becomes more and more the master of the earth” through his work. Cardinal Wyszyński writes that labor is meant to lead to “the full development and perfection of man.”<sup>100</sup> Through it, man can discover his endurance, talents, abilities, weaknesses, and physical strengths. Accordingly, man finds his vocation and purpose.

Still, work does not come without its toil and hardship, and the Pope cites the book of creation: “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread.” Whether physical or intellectual, this feeling of toil from work is universal and “familiar to all workers since work is a universal calling.”<sup>101</sup> John Paul II could write and speak extensively on the toil and hardship of work because of his personal experience as a laborer under the occupation of the German Reich. In fact, he is the only pope in history to have worked a job in manual labor. Although it was forced upon him, his experiences under both Nazism and Sovietism allowed him to state boldly during his 1979 pilgrimage, “Christianity and the Church have no fear of the world of work. They have no fear of the system based on work. The Pope has no fear of men of work. They have always been particularly close to him. He has come from their midst. He has come from the quarries of Zakrzówek, from the Solvay furnaces in Borek Fałęcki, and then from Nowa Huta. Through all these surroundings, through his own experience of work, I make bold to say that the Pope

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., sec. 6.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., sec. 7.

<sup>99</sup> John Paul II, “To the Workers in Jasna Góra,” The Holy See, July 5, 1979, sec. 2, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19790606\\_polonia-jasna-gora-operai.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790606_polonia-jasna-gora-operai.html).

<sup>100</sup> Wyszyński, *Love & Social Justice: Reflections on Society*, 444.

<sup>101</sup> John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, sec. 9.

learned the Gospel anew.”<sup>102</sup> It was through these laboring experiences that John Paul II began better to understand the dignity of the human person and the danger that comes with treating people as mere tools in the line of production. John Paul II recognized both the way labor could be abused and the way labor could be used to develop an individual.

Despite work’s toil, work remains “a good thing for man,” and for humanity as well, since through the process man “transforms nature” to create a better world and ultimately “achieves fulfillment as a human being.”<sup>103</sup> Pope John Paul II stated to the workers of Jasna Góra during his 1979 pilgrimage, “Work must help man to become better, more mature spiritually, more responsible, in order that he may realize his vocation on earth both as an unrepeatable person and in community with others, especially in the fundamental human community constituted by the family.”<sup>104</sup> It is only through this hard work that man can achieve his dominion over the earth as God intended and fulfill his purpose accordingly, but labor must be able to be conducted in a system that rewards hard work. Above all, there must be a system in place that motivates individuals every day to create, prosper, and solve problems. Therefore, one must ask if communism is the economic and social system that inspires prosperity, motivates individuals, and cultivates hard work? Can a system designed around the collective achieve the best results for a person and his family?

### **The Communist Economic Model Devalues the Individual**

In order to create a communist egalitarian society, each man must produce according to his ability and only take according to his needs. The result is that man is no longer seen as an individual with a specific purpose and destiny but as a worker who is treated as a means to an end and, ultimately, as the property of the State. Man no longer has a purpose outside of the State, but becomes a soulless machine. John Paul II highlights this grave error of socialism in *Centesimus Annus*: “the fundamental error of socialism is anthropological in nature. Socialism considers the individual person simply as an element, a molecule within the social organism so that the good of the individual is completely subordinated to the functioning of the socio-economic mechanism.”<sup>105</sup>

Serving the socio-economic mechanisms for the good of society in a socialist or communist system makes a grave, false assumption about human nature. It assumes that people will work selflessly for the common good of people with whom they do not have a relationship or connection. The reality is that humans are naturally selfish and mainly look out for themselves or for their family and friends. A timeline of human history would support the fact that humans tend to be greedy, jealous, and competitive. It is highly unlikely that the production of goods would be distributed equally (as is promised in socialism and communism), for the simple reason that people are people, and their natural instincts will take over. Communism can only be successful

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<sup>102</sup> John Paul II, “Shrine of the Holy Cross in Mogila,” The Holy See, June 8, 1979, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19790609\\_polonia-mogila-nowa-huta.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790609_polonia-mogila-nowa-huta.html).

<sup>103</sup> John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, sec. 9.

<sup>104</sup> John Paul II, “To the Workers in Jasna Góra,” sec. 2.

<sup>105</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, sec. 13.

if communities pledge to be continuously altruistic. Naturally, there will be people who are content with working less. A majority may have personal ambitions and goals and aspire to climb the hierarchy in life, but there is no point if there is an equal outcome regardless of the effort one puts in. Therefore, people must surrender their self-interest to the leadership of the State, which claims to know what is best for each person. As socialism “considers the individual person simply as an element,” it effectively ignores the wants and desires of individuals and focuses only on the wants of the collective.<sup>106</sup> Cardinal Wyszyński also wisely noted that communism replaces the “individual conscience with the collective conscience.”<sup>107</sup>

Furthermore, ignoring the will of the individual forms a society where humans are treated as if they are herd animals without any individuality. Each person possesses different abilities, talents, strengths, weaknesses, and therefore cannot be grouped or labeled into one equal collective unit known as the working class. In addition, because of each individual’s different levels of productivity, not everyone can be expected to produce the same amount. Some people will be advanced in their abilities, while others will lag behind. Creating an equilibrium where all people produce the same output or quality of work is unrealistic. This is why, for example, during the times of the Soviet Union, the Kulak farmers who were skilled and able to produce more crops were punished or executed for their “over-achievement,” while the novice farmers were also punished or killed for their “under-achievement.” Each farmer had to produce the same amount, regardless of their abilities. Working for the collective will ultimately create a society where no one will be inspired to put in more than the average amount of productivity, if that. In effect, people cannot be creative with the gifts, talents, and strengths they were born with if they are subject to these dictated conditions. Each person is an individual with unique preferences, who should never be forced by another person, or entity, to achieve “equal ends.”

John Paul II believed that each person possessed unique abilities for a reason and should use them to fulfill his own purpose here on earth. He states this directly in *Centesimus Annus*: “where self-interest is violently suppressed, it is replaced by a burdensome system of bureaucratic control which dries up the wellsprings of initiative and creativity.”<sup>108</sup> It becomes much more difficult for people to live out the life they were called to when they cannot control their destiny and their choices, and their value as a person is equated to the value their production contributes to society. Further, people are individuals with specific gifts, and when they are grouped into a mass, their individuality and personal contributions are taken away. Equity goes against human nature, as people were not created to be equal in their abilities, but rather to flourish and become the best version of themselves.

The further implication of working for the collective is that the person becomes reliant on the State for all his needs. Primate Wyszyński explains that man is unable to function with the state’s guidance and help because “The citizen of a communist state is theoretically the owner of everything, but in practice, he owns nothing.”<sup>109</sup> Thus, “The State becomes man’s only

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Wyszyński, *Love & Social Justice*, 242.

<sup>108</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, sec. 25.

<sup>109</sup> Wyszyński, *Love & Social Justice*, 240.

providence.”<sup>110</sup> When the government controls all the means of production as well as the allocation of resources of products and services, certain questions arise such as: “Who is controlling the means of production, who determines who gets what, and how do we know we can trust those in charge?”<sup>111</sup> A popular argument in support of communism claims that its previous failings can be attributed to the fact that the world has only seen “bad” authoritarian leaders in charge and, therefore, communism has not been tried in its “true form.” If leaders who were democratically elected, trustworthy, and had the people’s best interest in mind were to rule, communism or socialism in practice would look much different. However, the reality is that all people are corruptible, selfish, and capable of greed.

In addition, how can it be guaranteed that those elected would have the best interest of all people in mind? Likely, a communist or socialist leadership would not be representative of all of society but rather only that of the far left. The history of socialist and communist societies proves that with economic control comes political control accordingly. All radically egalitarian societies must be commanded by force and always end up more authoritarian. Therefore, it is best to have a political and economic system that aligns with a person’s fallen nature and can hold those in power accountable. Leaders such as John Paul II advocated for democratic societies, paired with a just rule of law and free market economies, in order to prevent the government or State from having too much power. Man is called to freedom, and freedom must be present in every sector of society.

### **John Paul II Advocates for Democracy, Free Market Economies, and Just Rule of Law**

The foundation for a properly functioning socio-political structure begins when a just, sovereign rule of law is established. John Paul II explains that this is possible when the legislative, executive, and judicial branches are each balanced by one another and can keep the responsibility of one another “within proper bounds.”<sup>112</sup> This is contrary to Marxist societies where the elite and their inner circles rule. These Marxist leaders are not bound to the law nor to “an objective criterion of good and evil beyond the will of those in power, since such a criterion, in given circumstances, could be used to judge their actions.”<sup>113</sup> Their elite membership allows them to create their own law based on their own interests and, accordingly, exempt themselves from any faults. As seen in Marxist and totalitarian societies throughout history, without the structure of a just rule of law that holds people accountable, there cannot be an authentic democracy. John Paul II writes, “Authentic democracy is possible only in a State ruled by law, and on the basis of a correct conception of the human person.”<sup>114</sup> The pope further adds that “the root of modern totalitarianism is to be found in the denial of the transcendent dignity of the

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> “Are We Becoming More Radical? The Rise of Democratic Socialism in America,” Institute of World Politics, 2020, video, 01:08:12, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gB3xPe7ub40&t=2892s>.

<sup>112</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, sec. 44.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., sec. 45.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., sec. 46.



human person who, as the visible image of the invisible God, is therefore by his very nature the subject of right which no one may violate.”<sup>115</sup>

When there is no transcendent truth to follow, “then there is no sure principle for guaranteeing just relations between people,” which allows the power and self-interest of the elites to take over.<sup>116</sup> As previously discussed, this is why Marxist leaders can and will use any means possible, including murder, to accomplish the goals of the State. The social structure of society must be built on a just rule of law, based on an ultimate and transcendent truth. When there is no ultimate truth, and no morals or values “to guide and direct political activity,” then any position or idea “can be easily manipulated for reasons of power.”<sup>117</sup> Without truth and morality, good and evil are relative to one another. This moral relativism ultimately will affect the individual the most. Thus, the human person loses his dignity, as he is only a tool for the political class to achieve its desires. John Paul II concludes, “As history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism.”<sup>118</sup> Democracy can only function in a world where people understand their human identity, their human finality, and ultimately live according to their convictions. This all begins with the judicial framework of society, however. If it is to be authentic, democracy must be founded on a rule of law that protects human rights and guides the common good toward the truth.

This criterion also applies in the economic sense. It is important to recall that John Paul II was not an economist, but a leader of the Church. Therefore, when it came to economics, his role was more so to speak out on what conditions the State and the marketplace should possess so that the well-being of the person was considered. The law should create the legal framework in which markets can function, so that the result is both prosperity and genuine human flourishing. Above all, he advocated for an economic system that did not allow one person or group of people to hold too much power. The pope does not necessarily endorse one economic system over another. It is obvious he is against socialism and communism, but he is also not an uncritical supporter of capitalism. What he says instead is:

[. . .] can it perhaps be said that, after the failure of Communism, capitalism is the victorious social system, and that capitalism is the victorious social system, and that capitalism is the victorious social system, and that capitalism should be the goal of the countries now making efforts to rebuild their economy and society? Is this the model which ought to be proposed to the countries of the Third World which are searching for the path to true economic and civil progress?

The answer is obviously complex. If by "capitalism" is meant an economic system which recognizes the fundamental and positive role of business, the market, private property and the resulting responsibility for the means of production, as well as free human creativity in the economic sector, then the answer is certainly in the affirmative, even though it would perhaps be more appropriate to speak of a "business economy," "market economy" or simply "free

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., sec. 44.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., sec. 46.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

economy." But if by "capitalism" is meant a system in which freedom in the economic sector is not circumscribed within a strong juridical framework which places it at the service of human freedom in its totality, and which sees it as a particular aspect of that freedom, the core of which is ethical and religious, then the reply is certainly negative."<sup>119</sup>

John Paul II advocated for a free-market economy that was regulated by people's personal decisions: "The free market is the most efficient instrument for utilizing resources and effectively responding to needs."<sup>120</sup> He believed in the power of consumer choice, "Certainly the mechanisms of the market offer secure advantages: they help to utilize resources better; they promote the exchange of products; above all they give central place to the person's desires and preferences, which, in a contract meet the desires and preferences of another person."<sup>121</sup> In communism, consumers have no choice of what to buy because all aspects of the economy are regulated by the State. Further, often the state planners cannot adequately predict consumer behavior, so the end results are always surpluses or shortages. When the free market regulates consumers' wants and needs, there are no long-term surpluses or shortages in materials nor products because the market can adjust and adapt.

Still, this does not mean that John Paul II did not endorse State intervention when necessary. For example, he explains, "The State has a duty to sustain business activities by creating conditions which will ensure job opportunities, by stimulating those activities where they are lacking or by supporting them in moments of crisis."<sup>122</sup> Next, he believes that "The State has the further right to intervene when particular monopolies create delays or obstacles to development."<sup>123</sup> Lastly, he supported a pro-family policy and believed State aid was necessary to fund welfare payments, social benefits, education for children, general family needs, and any other necessary matters for families, the poor, and the disabled. Overall, State intervention is appropriate if it does not disrupt economic and civic freedom, and indeed is occasionally necessary for furthering economic and human development.

Lastly, free market economies and regulated capitalism are more aligned with human nature because people respond to incentives. Capitalism is an economic system that rewards innovation, creation, and progress. Entrepreneurs first seek out what is desired on the market and invest their own money and materials to create products. They are willing to do so because of the incentive to get paid. Further, entrepreneurs have an obligation to provide high-quality products because they know consumers can always take their money elsewhere. This process not only allows the entrepreneurs themselves to develop as people in their work, but also develop all of society. Further, entrepreneurs can then hire workers, who will also have an incentive to develop the entrepreneur's business, because of the wage and benefits they can earn. In communism, there are no incentives to create or be more efficient, because there is one set wage and outcome for all people. The pope himself endorses entrepreneurship: "The role of disciplined and

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., sec. 42.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., sec. 34.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., sec. 40.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., sec. 48.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

creative human work and, as an essential part of that work, initiative and entrepreneurial ability becomes increasingly evident and decisive.”<sup>124</sup> It is man’s intelligence, or his “capital,” that allows him to discover best what society needs and wants. This freedom to create and think is taken away in communist systems. In contrast, capitalism and free market economies empower these human abilities.

### **John Paul II’s Critique of Capitalism, Consumerism, and Materialism**

One common criticism of the capitalist system is that its main goal is profit, which is seemingly equivalent to greed. On the contrary, John Paul II affirms that profit is not bad: “The Church acknowledges the legitimate role of profit as an indication that a business is functioning well. When a firm makes a profit, this means that productive factors have been properly employed and corresponding human needs have been duly satisfied.”<sup>125</sup> The pope rather criticizes businesses that solely focus on making a profit and neglect the condition of their workers as a result. For example, a worker’s wage should not be cut for the sake of profit, employees should not be overworked, a person’s age and sex must be considered, and the conditions in the workplace should not be dangerous or unclean. The people above all are a “firm’s most valuable assets” and cannot be degraded for the sake of profit.<sup>126</sup> Man should not be treated as an equal to the means of production or as an instrument. John Paul II states that, “Profit is a regulator of the life of a business, but it is not the only one; *other human and moral factors* must also be considered which, in the long term, are at least equally important for the life of a business.”<sup>127</sup>

John Paul II wrote during the days when capitalism largely subjected people to inhumane conditions in factories. His main concerns with capitalism focused on the machine overpowering the man, fostering a world of materialism and a spirit of selfish profit, as well as exploiting workers through poor working conditions and low wages. First, in regard to technology and machinery dominating man, John Paul II asserts that “technology can cease to be man’s ally and become almost his enemy, as when the mechanization of work “supplants” him, taking away all personal satisfaction and the incentive to creativity and responsibility, when it deprives many workers of their previous employment, or when, through exalting the machine, it reduces man to the status of its slave.”<sup>128</sup> Although machinery and technological advancements are ultimately the fruits of man’s labor and intellect, they can easily overpower a man and create unjust circumstances. Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński reiterates John Paul II’s message: “There is something tragic about the fact that factory machinery is improving, technology is developing, and the value of products is increasing, while man himself falls further and further.”<sup>129</sup> As technology advances at a rapid rate, the need for human labor disappears since the machine can

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., sec. 32.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., sec. 35.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, sec. 5.

<sup>129</sup> Wyszyński, 445.

complete the same task, if not better, at a cheaper price. Man and his needs ultimately become subordinate to the machine. John Paul II opposed businessmen and factory owners growing wealthy and maximizing profits at the cost of their employees, economically and physically.

Second, John Paul II believed that Godless capitalism fueled a society based on materialism. He saw that the richer and more developed a country, the easier it is for its society to fall into a materialistic lifestyle. This is because the more society focuses on making money and buying the newest products, the less human factors such as family and community matter. Living in a consumer society causes people to have “no sense of connection or obligation to anything greater than fulfilling their own desires.”<sup>130</sup> Cardinal Wyszyński writes about the similarities between communism and unregulated capitalism: “capitalism feeds on the illusory happiness of earthly life, and, like communism, wants to create paradise on earth.”<sup>131</sup> He continues, “capitalism does not desire the satisfaction of the needs of society. . . This is capitalism’s greatest flaw: its main aim is profit.”<sup>132</sup> John Paul II makes a similar point in *Centesimus Annus*: “[The consumer society] agrees with Marxism, in the sense that it totally reduces man to the sphere of economics and the satisfaction material needs.”<sup>133</sup>

Indeed, a society built on materialistic principles will collapse; however, John Paul II reminds his people that “it is not wrong to want to live better; what is wrong is a style of life which is presumed to be better when it is directed towards “having” rather than “being”, and which wants to have more, not in order to be more but in order to spend life in enjoyment as an end in itself.”<sup>134</sup> The desire for material goods is not wrong if they are not “an end in themselves.”<sup>135</sup> Striving for goods becomes wrong once they are subordinate to a man’s personal, religious, and moral needs. Accordingly, man must be able to control his desire to continuously possess and enjoy. John Paul also emphasizes that when families only provide their children with “more material goods as the answer for their lives” they end up “passing on to the younger generations a world that will be poor in essential spiritual values, poor in peace and poor in justice.”<sup>136</sup> Thus, it is critical for families and societies to balance their need for material goods and non-material purposes. In the end, greed is a human characteristic and choice, not an aspect of an economic system.

Lastly, John Paul II was concerned with the prioritization of profit over people. As mentioned, profit is only one factor of a business. Without human and moral factors such as a worker’s well-being and a work community, a business will not flourish. For example, alienation at work “when it is organized to ensure maximum returns and profits with no concern whether the worker, through his own labor, grows or diminishes as a person” causes man to be treated as a means to an end.<sup>137</sup> In addition to this, an environment focused on profit and competition can

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<sup>130</sup> Rod Dreher, *Live Not By Lies* (New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 2020), 133.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 311.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, 312.

<sup>133</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, sec. 19.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, sec 36.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>136</sup> Peggy Polk, “Pope John Paul II Attacked Marxism and Materialism Today...” UPI, December 20, 1984, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1984/12/20/Pope-John-Paul-II-attacked-Marxism-and-materialism-today/7450472366800/>.

<sup>137</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, sec. 41.

make it hard to build relationships in the workplace. It should also be noted that most goods require a web of people to cooperate with one another for their production. John Paul II continues to explain that “A society is alienated if its forms of social organization, production, and consumption make it more difficult to offer this gift of self and to establish this solidarity between people.”<sup>138</sup> Community is essential both to society and to businesses, for it is not good that man should be alone. Man was wired for social coexistence, and he cannot achieve his life goals without the assistance of the community and other people. In fact, John Paul II advocated for a system known as “subsidiarity” which prioritizes the community and smaller organizations to deal with social and/or economic problems.

### **John Paul II’s Best Solution: Subsidiarity**

Subsidiarity is a system that handles constituent issues on a local, community level before going to the federal government for assistance. It is a method that advocates “local is best” because “those closest to the problem or need can usually deal with it more effectively, more compassionately, and at a more human-personal level.”<sup>139</sup> It is inefficient for issues to be tackled by “a bigger and more complicated organization or level of society” when they can be handled by “a smaller and simpler one.”<sup>140</sup> Indeed, federal help is often not the best solution when individuals, charities, and private organizations can understand the specific problems firsthand. Usually, assistance from the federal government looks like supplying the community with materials and funds, but John Paul II reminds his people that “certain kinds of demands often call for a response which is not simply material, but which is capable of perceiving the deeper human need.”<sup>141</sup> A successful socio-economic system starts with the success of each individual whose needs are best addressed and understood by those closest to them.

John Paul II criticizes the “Welfare State” or the “Social Assistance State” for its impersonal and bureaucratic approach. He explains that by simply giving communities more money, the “Welfare State” ends up depleting “society of its responsibility” and “leads to a loss of human energies.”<sup>142</sup> In order for the effects of welfare to be long-lasting, there needs to be a cultural change, which can only be realized when people have incentives and motivation to work. The function of the federal government should rather be to support the communities, but “not interfere in the internal life of a lower order.”<sup>143</sup> Subsidiarity reminds people that “we do not need a State which regulates and controls everything” nor will material aid be enough to satisfy communities and individuals.<sup>144</sup> Overall, subsidiarity is a community-based solution that is more efficient, personal, and even cost-effective. It is even a method that aligns better with human nature, as humans were created for social bonds and community. However, communities and

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Kengor, *The Devil*, 158.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, sec. 48.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Kengor, *The Devil*, 159.

individuals cannot be formed without the guidance of the family. The family is where a person's values and morals are taught. It is where strength is found, and love is nourished. This is why Marxism is always determined to demolish the structure of the family. Without it, society will slowly collapse and, ultimately, become easier to control.

## **The Third Fatal Flaw of Communism: Elimination of the Family and Private Property**

### **The Importance of the Family and Small Communities**

*"The family is the first and basic human community. It is a sphere of life, it is a sphere of love. The life of every society, nation and State depends on the family, on whether the family is a true sphere of life and love in their midst. Much has to be done; indeed, everything possible has to be done, to give to the family those means that it needs... Here is a vast and rich programme on which depends the future of the individual and of the nation."*<sup>145</sup> -- John Paul II, Częstochowa, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1979

When the Nazis and Soviets invaded Poland, they had an overarching goal to erase the Polish identity as well as the Polish Catholic Church, the main institution which contributed to "Polishness." The church and the family were the only social institutions that these regimes could not fully infiltrate. Regardless, the Nazis and Communists did what they could to make it difficult for Poles to practice their faith and for the family to function. These regimes banned building permits for more churches, mosques, temples, etc., arrested and killed religious leaders, had officers listen in on people's confessions with their priests, destroyed religious symbols, and imposed other injustices of this nature. They also simultaneously began dismantling the family by implementing discouraging laws that would make it difficult to maintain a relationship with one's family members and/or give citizens the chance to build a big family.

For example, work schedules were created around school schedules so that parents wouldn't have time to see or talk with their children. In addition to this, apartments were purposely built small, to discourage parents from having more children. Accordingly, abortion and birth control were widely encouraged methods to control the size of the family. The children who made it into the world were indoctrinated by Communist and Nazi propaganda in their schools: anti-religious teachings, the rewriting of history, and the enforcement of learning the Russian or German languages. During Soviet times, children were taught above all to be dependent on the State for every single one of their needs. The regimes held a monopoly on all the information that was being taught in academia and broadcasted on news networks. All of this proves that without the foundation of the family, children and young adults can be influenced and/or ruined by political ideologies and social customs much more easily.

The family plays an irreplaceable role in developing a child's human, social, and spiritual life. Pope Francis explains that "in the family, we find the basic values of love, fraternity and

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<sup>145</sup> John Paul II, "Recitation of 'The Call of Jasna Gora,'" The Holy See, June 5, 1979, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/june/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19790605\\_polonia-jasna-gora-appello.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19790605_polonia-jasna-gora-appello.html).

mutual respect, which translate into essential values for society as a whole: gratuitousness, solidarity and subsidiarity.”<sup>146</sup> Indeed, what children learn from the family is later poured back into society. A strong family can produce strong citizens, who then contribute to forming strong civil societies. It is first in the family that man is prepared to coexist with society and other people. The family is responsible for developing the personhood of each child and teaches them morals, values, behaviors, respect, and the like. If children are not raised by family members, then they will be raised by society. This is risky in today’s culture, as it is becoming increasingly common to accept “woke” Leftist views and see “the traditional family as an oppressive institution.”<sup>147</sup> Therefore, it has become risky to “entrust the lives of children to dishonest physicians and selfish parents,” as well as to selfish teachers and social media.<sup>148</sup> Understandably, the family cannot control all external forces their children encounter, but the family can ground children in the truth, which then helps children decipher what is right and what is wrong. Still, the family is not a source of love and guidance for everyone; family can be a “blessing or the source of our tears.”<sup>149</sup> Thus, it is just as critical to have small social groups that are molded after the structure of families.

Communities “can rescue the lone individual” and provide a sense of freedom, even in a society that is completely controlled.<sup>150</sup> John Paul II, before he officially became pope, was a key example of someone who provided fellowship and small group communities in Soviet-ruled Poland. When he was a priest at a university parish in Kraków called St. Florian, Father Wojtyła met weekly with a group of 20 young adults, who eventually started calling themselves the “rodzinka” or the “little family.” This little family one day grew to comprise around 200 young people. Father Wojtyła’s community met for prayer, weekday mass, fellowship, philosophical discussions, outdoor trips, and sometimes just for simple meals to chat. Wojtyła put in this effort to create these small communities to keep faith alive in an atheistic society, but also because he knew young people needed to feel some sense of freedom and solidarity in their lives. One student named Bronisław Sonik shared, “The Church was the only place where you could meet and feel free and independent. Wojtyła’s reflections on how to be young and faithful but also politically active in those dangerous times impressed all of us. When our activities became much more illegal and the authorities started to arrest our colleagues, we used to visit Wojtyła late at night in his palace. He sustained us.”<sup>151</sup>

Another example of valuing small groups comes from Frantisek Miklosko, a prominent leader of the former Slovak underground church. He notes that the efforts of Slovak bishop Jan Chryzostom Korec (later made a cardinal by John Paul II) to maintain their small faith community were reminiscent of Father Wojtyła’s contributions. Misklosko explains, “He told us

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<sup>146</sup> Pope Francis, “Apostolic Journey - Ecuador: Meeting with Political, Economic and Civic Leaders (San Francisco Church in Quito),” The Holy See, July 7, 2015, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150707\\_ecuador-societa-civile.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/july/documents/papa-francesco_20150707_ecuador-societa-civile.html).

<sup>147</sup> Dreher, 132.

<sup>148</sup> Wyszynski, 94.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>150</sup> Dreher, 169.

<sup>151</sup> Helen Whitney, “His Faith | John Paul II - The Millennial Pope | Frontline,” PBS, 2014, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/pope/etc/faith.html>.



that they” —the communists— “could take everything from us. They could take *samizdat* from us. They can take our opportunity to speak out publicly from us. But we can’t let them take away our small communities.”<sup>152</sup> A social life is critical for the development and well-being of a person.

The necessity of both small groups and families in people’s lives proves that human beings are wired for social coexistence. Community and family provide strength, accountability, a feeling of solidarity, and help to maintain high morale, especially in hostile societies. The atomization of society causes people to become easy targets of manipulation and loneliness. The current age of social media and technology has made it common for people to live behind a screen and have limited social contact. This is why it is also important to note that there is strength in numbers. This means building communities, friendships, and small groups with people outside of our religion and immediate world/political views. For example, during the times of communism, “secular liberals shared with Christians the conviction that communism was a destructive lie.”<sup>153</sup> Christian and secular dissidents were forced to stick together in former Czechoslovakia, “because there were so few believers within resistance circles.”<sup>154</sup> Different groups of people can enrich one another and provide a new perspective on life, but above all “you have to take allies where you can.”<sup>155</sup> The most important aspect is to be supportive of one another, regardless of the differences, and share the same end goal.

Lastly, it is important to note that these small communities did not need to meet in a fancy setting or have fun events planned. It was enough to have a common meeting spot and place to discuss ideas. Take John Paul II’s Rhapsodic Theater group, which he was a part of before he became a priest and was still debating his vocation. Wojtyła and his friends met in homes of the different theater members each week to act out and write various plays pertaining to Polish history and culture. They understood the importance of keeping the memory of Poland alive in a society that was trying to erase it. They also understood what the consequences could be if they should be caught, yet these young theater students risked their lives to have some form of freedom and community. A simple community can bring great joy; all that is needed is a place to meet and shared values. The same idea of “simpleness” applies to the family.

When looking back at the lives of heroes from the 20<sup>th</sup> century who fought communism and totalitarianism, one can see that most of these people came from modest, often poor homes, and lived in very ordinary towns or cities. It was the spiritual nurturing of the parents and family that developed heroes such as John Paul II and Jerzy Popiełuszko. Father Popiełuszko was described as “a mediocre seminary student and an undistinguished priest – until the rise of solidarity.” He grew up in the village of Okopy, labeled an “impoverished rural village” with nothing particularly spiritual.<sup>156</sup> In the house where Popiełuszko grew up, “there’s one room that has been set apart as a kind of museum, but all the items there are under a thick veil of dust. By the wall is

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<sup>152</sup> Dreher, 169.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 147.

a small table, covered with a kind of plastic sheet. There is a small piece of paper with handwriting on it, written by Father Jerzy's brother. It said, 'Every day near the table we were praying with our mother.' There is a photo of that mother as an old, tired woman."<sup>157</sup> This shows that it is the spiritual seeds of families that help develop the person more than anything. Neither abundant material means, nor socio-political ideologies can raise a child better than the simple love and commitment a family has to one another and to God. This is precisely why communism is determined to eliminate the family, because "the end of the family means the downfall of society."<sup>158</sup> Lone individuals and those with weak family ties are not as resilient to face the authority of the State. Accordingly, communism eliminates private property, because "the well-being of the family must be based on private property."<sup>159</sup>

### **The Abolition of Private Property and All Right of Inheritance**

*"The theory of the Communists may be summed up in a single sentence: Abolition of private property." – Karl Marx*

Private property is bound to natural law and natural rights. Wyszynski explains, "Property is inscribed in human nature and in the nature of things."<sup>160</sup> God's moral law and order require man to possess private property. Each person is entitled to private property because private property is the fruit of one's work and is the physical realization of one's liberty as a citizen. Further, people and families naturally take up space and need space to occupy while they are on Earth. The well-being of both the individual and of the family "must be based on private property," because private property ensures man's "desirable permeance and security."<sup>161</sup> If man is responsible for his life, then he must have the freedom to possess that which is necessary to sustain his basic needs. One could argue that collective land is sufficient to fulfill man's basic needs; however, collective land deprives man of access to his personal life obligations and therefore disrespects man's personal freedom. Thus, collective land is the "denial of freedom."<sup>162</sup>

The first problem is that collective land does not allow a man to prioritize himself and his family. Instead, man is forced to prioritize the State and the collective as a whole. Communism requires man to be continuously altruistic. Yet one cannot forget the natural human tendencies of greed, self-interest, and competition. Man is inclined to work only when he knows he will be able to support himself and his family first. Further, man derives a zeal for labor when there is an incentive to earn. Private property provides the incentive to work harder and invest, because owners will desire to improve their property/means of production if they know they will receive a better wage because of it. Simply put, private property incentivizes owners to maximize the value of their resources. It should be noted that private property not only means land and real

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 147, 148.

<sup>158</sup> Wyszynski, 92.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 529.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 528.

estate, but also objects and even intellectual property. Ownership also provides the incentive to work hard, because a person will be inclined to save some of his resources for the future as well as for his future family lineage. Pius XI affirms that the State cannot infringe on the rights of inheritance: “The natural right itself both of owning goods privately and of passing them on by inheritance are always to remain intact and inviolate, since this indeed is a right that the State cannot take away.”<sup>163</sup>

Property and means of production that are passed down for generations are taken better care of and therefore become better developed. There is no incentive to work more efficiently on a collective plot, because of the prohibition of inheritance and saving resources. When looking at both ancient civilizations and American history, one can see how societies only began to develop when there was private property, and laws in place to protect that private ownership. There is also no incentive to work more efficiently on collective land because the outcome is the same for all. People will only be incentivized to work enough to provide for their own families, or perhaps people will even work below an average rate of productivity if they think they can depend on others. It should lastly be noted that the confiscation of private property in communist societies is often violent in nature.

### **Private Property Contains a Social Function**

John Paul II did not believe that private property should be used only to fulfill personal and family necessities, but also the needs of society. He states, “Man works in order to provide for the needs of his family, his community, his nation, and ultimately all humanity.”<sup>164</sup> Therefore, private property also contains an “intrinsically social function” because the goods of this world were intended for every person: “God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favoring anyone.”<sup>165</sup> John Paul II explains that private property is “in fact, under a social mortgage” which means private property must help distribute goods for all people scattered throughout the earth.<sup>166</sup> Owners of private property have a moral obligation to meet social demands and help the greatest number of people, especially the poor, sick, and elderly. This does not mean, however, that one’s family needs should not be prioritized. Man can only help society after his own needs are accomplished first. Therefore, the intention of private property is bilateral: Citizens should always defend an individual’s right to possess private property for their personal needs, but also, owners must be sure to serve society with their resources, land, social goods, etc.<sup>167</sup> The State is obliged to protect the right to private property for a twofold reason. Firstly, since private property is necessary for the development of the human person and the family, ownership is an “extension

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<sup>163</sup> Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, The Holy See, May 15, 1941, sec. 49, [https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_15051891\\_rerum-novarum.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html).

<sup>164</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, sec. 43.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 31.

<sup>166</sup> John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, The Holy See, December 30, 1987, sec. 42, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_30121987\\_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html).

<sup>167</sup> Wyszyński, 548.

of human freedom.”<sup>168</sup> Secondly, ownership contributes to the common good and is more effective in helping the most people than collective property/land. Private property helps the individual flourish, as well as society as a whole.

### **Does Communism Truly Lead to Equality and Prosperity?**

The reality is that economic systems should be designed according to human nature and how people behave. This is best achieved when people have incentives to strive for and private ownership to maintain. The ideals that John Paul II stood for, such as freedom, prosperity, innovation, consumer choice, and human flourishing, are much more obtainable in a free enterprise or capitalist system than in communism. What is needed is an economic system that will lead to prosperity, income growth, and wealth accumulation-- an economic system that will inspire people to wake up every day and solve problems. This is not possible without the right to private property and ownership. Further, a thriving system is obtainable when the economic and socio-political systems are aligned with human nature and do not allow one person or group of people to become too powerful. Marx designed a socio-economic system that is in direct conflict with human nature. Communism overemphasizes the role of the State and deemphasizes the role of the individual person and family. One must ask themselves, does communism bring out the best in people and inspire all of us to be equal and work towards prosperity? One only needs to look at the history of communism and the tyrants it produced to answer this question.

### **The Appropriate Role of the State**

As seen in communist and totalitarian societies, the State proclaims itself as man’s ultimate end and purpose. All man’s actions must be subordinate to the will of the State: “the individual takes on meaning only in the state.”<sup>169</sup> Man is not treated as an individual with a specific purpose and destiny, but rather as a tool who must abide to the will of the communist elites. Man’s life can even be sacrificed if this means achieving the ends of the State. For man has no worth in the communist system: “the individual is merely the means, the tool which the state freely uses in order to achieve its collective goals.”<sup>170</sup> Leaders such as Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński and Pope John Paul II recognized that each person is designed to be an instrument of God, not a tool of the State.

Further, these knights of freedom repeatedly proclaimed that the true role of the State is to allow human flourishing, the “flourishing of their personhood,” in all sectors of a person’s life.<sup>171</sup> Human flourishing, however, cannot be achieved in a society that is against man and interferes with man’s conscience. The State must ensure that there is religious, economic, political, social, and academic freedom, so that a person’s destiny on earth can be properly fulfilled. This includes protecting and prioritizing the family, the Church, private property, and labor rights. As stated by

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<sup>168</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, sec. 30.

<sup>169</sup> Wyszyński, 243.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

John Paul II, “all men and women are entrusted with the task of crafting their own life: in a certain sense, they are to make of it a work of art, a masterpiece.”<sup>172</sup> Men and women can only follow their destiny in a society that upholds human dignity and freedom. Overall, the function of the State is to ensure the common good of people and assist in developing the human person, not interfere with people’s rights and freedoms.

Primate Stefan Wyszyński summarized best what the true role of the State should be:

The State is a legal, economic and political community whose aim is the temporal good of the people; with respect to the person and to humanity it maintains its laws, strength, freedom to act, and authority, but, according to Cardinal Pacelli, “the individual participates in collective life not in order to lose his personhood, but instead to develop it.” ... Those who deny the rights of the person turn society into a great herd. This has been successfully accomplishing the collective state.<sup>173</sup>

## Why Communism Fails

John Paul II fought for the right to religious freedom, humane labor conditions, private property, and family values because these liberties ensure that people can live life as they were called to. Communism strips man of these freedoms and human rights so that man can “better” serve the State. However, through serving the State and the collective, communism fails economically, socially, politically, and spiritually. As stated by Stefan Wyszyński, “Communism wants to socialize both the human body and soul.”<sup>174</sup> First, communism fails in an economic sense because “A person who is deprived of something he can call “his own,” and of the possibility of earning a living through his own initiative, comes to depend on the social machine and on those who control it.”<sup>175</sup> This leads to no incentive to work more efficiently or be creative with one's talents. Next, communism fails in a social sense, because “the social nature of man is not completely fulfilled in the State, but is realized in various intermediary groups, beginning with the family and including economic, social, political and cultural groups which stem from human nature itself.”<sup>176</sup> Communism tries to destroy families and bans people from forming communities that represent anything outside of Marxist ideals. People cannot speak on topics such as history, academics, culture, and faith.

Third, communism fails politically, because one cannot trust one person or group of people to have the best interest of all people in mind. Even if democratically elected, it is impossible that these leaders’ political views will be representative of all of society. Humans are corruptible and self-interested; therefore, there needs to be a rule of law in place to stop people from turning into authoritarian leaders or tyrants. The promise of economic equality always leads

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<sup>172</sup> John Paul II, “Letter to Artists,” The Holy See, April 22, 1999, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_23041999\\_artists.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_23041999_artists.html).

<sup>173</sup> Wyszyński, 247.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 324.

<sup>175</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, sec. 13.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., sec 13.

to more authoritarianism, because once the state-controlled system starts to collapse, all institutions are liquidated. Lastly, communism fails spiritually, because it denies a relationship with one's creator and interferes with man's conscience. It forbids all religions, for fear of not being able to convert people fully to the Marxist ideology. Faith gives people hope, values, and the ability to persevere in harsh conditions. Marxism gives people the false idea that heaven on earth can be created, and that all of life's problems can be solved economically. As a result, in communist Soviet societies people were only valued in an economic sense and became mere tools for the aspirations of the State. What all this points to is that communism ultimately denies the freedom to act and think for oneself. Poland's Primate of the Millennium, Stefan Wyszyński, stated, "The spirit of freedom is the proper climate for the full development of the person. Without freedom, a person is dwarfed, and all progress dies."<sup>177</sup> By denying human freedom, rights, and dignity, communists never succeeded in creating their intended heaven on earth, but rather--from Lenin and Stalin to Pol Pot and Castro--all they ever achieved was hell on earth.

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<sup>177</sup> Wyszyński, 233.

## Chapter 2: Who was John Paul II?

*This chapter explores how John Paul II's early life and upbringing led him to devote his life to serving Christ and his fellow man. It serves as a brief introduction to John Paul II's life before he became pope, when he was known simply as Karol Wojtyła. It explores his family, his close relationship with his father, his journey through the consecrated life, his time working as a laborer, his love for theater and literature, and much more. It further investigates how growing up under both Nazi and Soviet oppression influenced and altered his perspective on life. His experience during these hardships can help the reader understand how concepts in his later writings, such as the dignity of the human person, suffering and hope, and the value of meaningful labor came to be. Ultimately, this chapter will show how all the events of Karol Wojtyła's life were like signs leading him to the priesthood and, eventually, to the highest calling of pope. By reading Karol Wojtyła's story, one can realize that there are no coincidences in life and that he was chosen by Divine Providence to become the great man that he was.*

### Karol Wojtyła's Family

When discussing John Paul II's impact on communism, it is first important to understand who he was as a person, and what life events shaped him to become this influential figure. His journey starts in Wadowice, Poland, a small city about 31 miles (50 kilometers) southwest of Kraków. He was born on May 18<sup>th</sup>, 1920. Poland was only newly independent at this time, freed from the partition between Russia, Prussia, and Austria. Although Poland's freedom did not last much past John Paul II's birth in 1920, Wojtyła would be among the first generation of Poles born in a finally independent Poland.<sup>178</sup>

John Paul II's given name was Karol Józef Wojtyła. As a child, his close friends and family referred to him as Lolek, to differentiate him from his father, also named Karol. His mother, Emelia Kaczorowska, died of kidney failure in 1929 when he was only 9 years old. Karol's older siblings also both passed away. Olga, his sister, died in infancy, and Edmund, his brother, died at the young age of 26, while aiding those who were sick with scarlet fever. Edmund, a doctor, later caught scarlet fever himself. He knew that he was continuously exposing himself to the disease yet did not let that get in the way of caring for others. Edmund's heroic example of selflessness and martyrdom would stay with his younger brother forever. Although the two brothers had a 14-year age gap, Edmund was a great role-model for Karol. The two always shared a close bond, and Edmund was very involved in raising young Karol after the death of their mother.

This series of tragedies all happened by the age of 12 for Wojtyła. After the death of his brother, Wojtyła was left under the care of only his father. Going through this series of family tragedies together brought Karol Senior and Karol Junior closer than ever before. Karol Senior was a tough man who served in the military his whole life. He was a lieutenant in the Polish

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<sup>178</sup> Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, xix.



Army and also served in the Austrian-Hungarian Army, where he worked at an administrative post. During his time in the military, Karol Senior was even “awarded the Austrian Iron Cross of Merit for bravery during World War I.”<sup>179</sup>

Wojtyła often credits his father’s example as the main source for his strong faith. He is quoted saying, “After her death and, later, the death of my older brother, I was left alone with my father, a deeply religious man. Day after day I was able to observe the austere way in which he lived ...*his example was in a way my first seminary*, a kind of domestic seminary.”<sup>180</sup> He further states, “My father’s words played a very important role because they directed me toward becoming a true worshiper of God.”<sup>181</sup> What was most admirable about Karol Senior was that despite the tragedies he faced, his faith remained strong. Instead of turning against God or cursing him, the future pope stated, “his pain became prayer.”<sup>182</sup> Karol Senior’s devotion and piety were characteristics that Karol Junior admired and laid the foundation for Karol to one day pursue his spiritual vocation. Unfortunately, Karol’s father would never witness his son enter the priesthood. In February of 1941, Karol Junior returned home from working at the stone quarry to see that his father had unexpectedly passed away from a heart attack. Wojtyła writes that he had been aware that his father’s health was declining but said he did not suspect his father was so close to death.

At only 20 years of age, young Karol was truly alone. He said about 40 years after the fact, “I was not at my mother’s death, I was not at my brother’s death, I was not at my father’s death. At twenty, I had already lost all the people I loved.”<sup>183</sup> However, if anything good came of it, the sudden death of his father is said to have “brought about a change, or perhaps it pushed him harder toward that which he already felt inside, that is, to become a priest.”<sup>184</sup> Even with the hardship of losing his whole earthly family, some speculate that these tragedies are what made Wojtyła’s bond to “his heavenly family even stronger.”<sup>185</sup>

## Karol’s Life During World War II

Karol’s early life was surrounded by loss, tragedy, and sorrow, but life still offered him happiness and enriching experiences. For example, Karol was a strong student who had a hunger for knowledge. Examining young Karol’s educational accomplishments, it is evident he excelled not only in academics but also in theater and the classics. In high school, he would participate in various plays, often acting as the lead character, and sometimes even would direct the plays

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<sup>179</sup> John Trigilio, Kenneth Brighenti, and Jonathan Toborowsky, *John Paul II* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing Inc., 2006), 49.

<sup>180</sup> John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery: On the Fiftieth Anniversary of My Priestly Ordination* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1996), 20.

<sup>181</sup> “About St. John Paul II: Saint John Paul II National Shrine,” St. John Paul II | Saint John Paul II National Shrine, 2023, <https://www.jp2shrine.org/en/about/jp2bio.html>.

<sup>182</sup> Alessandro Gisotti, “A Saint and His Family,” Vatican News, May 14, 2020, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-05/a-saint-and-his-family.html>.

<sup>183</sup> “Pope John Paul II: The Man, the Pope, the Road to Sainthood,” Walks of Italy, April 13, 2023, <https://www.walksofitaly.com/blog/art-culture/pope-john-paul-ii-who-was-he-and-why-was-he-important-part-i>.

<sup>184</sup> Alan Holdren, “Death of John Paul II’s Father Propelled Him to His Future Vocation,” Catholic News Agency, February 14, 2011, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/21953/death-of-john-paul-iis-father-propelled-him-to-his-future-vocation>.

<sup>185</sup> Helen Whitney, “His Faith | John Paul II - The Millennial Pope | Frontline,” PBS, 2014, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/pope/etc/faith.html>.

himself. He graduated from high school as the valedictorian in 1938 and enrolled at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków that same year. He decided to study Polish language and letters in the Faculty of Philosophy. Karol later would realize that his interest in this area of study was preparing him for his future in philosophy and theology. Wojtyła moved with his father to Kraków in 1938 to pursue his education, not knowing that his university studies would be short-lived.

Nazi Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, and World War II began. After the war officially began, Wojtyła and his father, along with thousands of others, headed East on foot in hopes of escaping the Nazi forces. To their dismay, they discovered the Soviet Union had begun occupying Poland from the Eastern border. They decided that returning to an occupied Kraków would be a better option than facing the risk of being deported or executed by the Red Army. Back in Kraków, the Wojtyłas began to live life under Nazi oppression and quickly discovered the lengths these oppressors were taking to eradicate the Polish nation.

The life of an ordinary Pole changed dramatically, as survival became the new norm. The Nazis did not fail to make their presence in the city known. Nazi flags and signs began to cover Kraków; a swastika flag hung high from the Wawel castle, and special shops designated “For Germans Only” left the Poles little food.<sup>186</sup> The food supply in the country was rationed, and the Germans had access to the best “meat, fresh vegetables, bread, and the only butter.” Poles had to wait hours in line starting at 4 A.M. for a simple loaf of black bread or were forced to buy food through the risky black market. There were even days when no food was available anywhere, and people were forced to eat whatever they could find.

The situation only got worse for the Wojtyłas when Karol Senior’s military pension was cut off, causing great financial stress. Later, all higher education was outlawed, and professors were sent to concentration camps. This is precisely what happened at Jagiellonian University when the Nazis called for a “meeting” with the faculty. In reality, this was a round-up to gather all the intellectuals and deport them to the Sachsenhausen concentration camps. Some professors and academic staff suspected the trap, but the 184 others who attended were not spared, and most of them eventually perished at the death camp. Unfortunately, the terror did not stop there. After the deportation, the Germans proceeded to loot Jagiellonian University, “wrecking libraries and destroying laboratories.”<sup>187</sup> This was only the beginning of the Nazi destruction and the regime’s efforts to erase Polish culture, starting with the closing of Polish schools, universities, newspapers, and the like.

In order to continue his education, Wojtyła attended underground, clandestine classes. Jagiellonian managed to reconstruct itself underground by 1942, with all of its pre-war departments. Almost every day for three years, 136 professors risked death as they taught 800 students, often gathering in the “safety” of the professors’ private homes late in the night. Wojtyła and his classmates continued studying the Polish language, literature, theater, and poetry despite the Nazi attempt to eradicate these topics.

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<sup>186</sup> Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 54.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

## Karol's Acting Career and Passion for the Arts

Before Wojtyła discovered his vocation, he felt a calling to become an actor. In fact, for a long time, he had yet even to consider the priesthood, as he was “completely absorbed by a passion for literature, especially dramatic literature, and for the theater.”<sup>188</sup> Wojtyła became interested in Polish literature, art, and theater at a young age. He started by playing leading roles in his high school plays and later became an actor for the Rhapsodic Theatre, a clandestine theater created by Wojtyła, his theatrical mentor, and his fellow actor friends. The Rhapsodic Theatre was not a physical building, but rather an act of protest that took place in different people's apartments to show a cultural and artistic resistance to the regime.<sup>189</sup> Wojtyła was not only an actor for the Rhapsodic Theatre but would also occasionally prepare the scripts and even direct the plays himself.

Throughout his life, Wojtyła wrote 6 plays in total and various poems. The themes of his works range from topics such as personal life struggles and joys to appreciating the Divine Providence and God's mystery. To avoid attracting attention from the communist regime, all Wojtyła's plays and poems written and published before October 1978 (the time he was elected as pope) used the pseudonym Andrzej Jawień, Piotr Jasień, A.J., or Stanisław Andrzej Gruda. His works can help us better understand who he was, what he valued in life, what influenced him and moved his soul—in short, how he came to be the prominent figure he was. His passion for the arts can also be remembered as something that brought happiness and joy during difficult times. He reflects in his book *Gift and Mystery*, “The dark period of the war and the occupation was brightened by the light of the beauty which radiates from music and poetry.”<sup>190</sup>

Although he did not ultimately pursue a life in theater or the arts, this love greatly shaped his character. His theatrical background no doubt helped him to understand the power of words and aided him becoming the strong speaker the world witnessed during his papacy. Paul Kengor writes in *The Divine Plan* that John Paul II “learned how to command audiences,” and his acting/communication skills were precisely what made him such a strong leader.<sup>191</sup> John Paul II had a natural charisma to him and a character that so many admired. His time in theater and the arts helped shape his ability to captivate an audience and influence people.

## The Only Pope Who Had Been a Laborer

According to new Nazi laws, all males between the ages of 14 and 70 were required to have a job if they wished to avoid deportation. A work card known as an *Arbeitskarte* would prove men's employment and permit them to stay in their city or town of residence. Male students often had to work during the early mornings and throughout the day, forcing them to study secretly during the evening or night. When the work card was first imposed, Wojtyła was

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<sup>188</sup> John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery*, 6.

<sup>189</sup> Leah Libresco, “Karol Wojtyła and the Rhapsodic Theater,” Word on Fire, October 22, 2018, <https://www.wordonfire.org/articles/fellows/karol-wojtyla-and-the-rhapsodic-theater/>.

<sup>190</sup> John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery*, 40.

<sup>191</sup> Kengor and Orlando, 15.

“a store messenger for a restaurant,” which allowed him the flexibility and time to continue his education and theatrical aspirations.<sup>192</sup> By the fall of 1940, however, the work requirements became stricter and required that the job had to be manual labor.

Due to this change, Karol started working at the Zakrzówek quarry, part of the Solvay Chemical plant, for eight hours a day regardless of weather conditions. At times it would be so cold that Karol and his friend would have to put petroleum jelly all over their faces so their skin wouldn’t freeze off. Temperatures could get as low as – 22 Fahrenheit (-30 Celsius).<sup>193</sup> His job at the quarry required him to “haul wheelbarrows full of crushed limestone from inside the quarry to a rail car that took them to a kiln.”<sup>194</sup> There was only one fifteen-minute break allowed for breakfast, when the men could eat whatever food they brought from home. Often it was “tough bread with jam and ersatz coffee.”<sup>195</sup> Luckily, the men also escaped every few hours to huddle around a warm iron stove. Besides these small breaks, the workers were breaking apart limestone and shoveling it into the railway cars for long hours every day. After three months of this hard labor, Karol was promoted to a riskier position as an assistant to a lead blaster named Franciszek Labus. This promotion entailed that young Karol was constantly around dangerous conditions and high explosives “used to break apart large pieces of the quarry walls.”<sup>196</sup> Thankfully, the quarrymen were good Poles who were sympathetic to these students and understood that they were being forced to work under these conditions.

Wojtyła writes about the lessons physical labor taught: “Having worked with my hands, I knew quite well the meaning of physical labor. Every day I had been with people who did heavy work. I came to know their living situations, their families, their interest, their human worth, and their dignity.”<sup>197</sup> This was one life experience that Wojtyła reflected on later, writing, “At the time I didn’t realize how important that experience would be for me.”<sup>198</sup> He learned the difficulties of physical labor while also gaining respect for his fellow man. This personal experience helped him greatly with the Young Christian Worker movement in Rome where the founder, Father Józef Cardijn, would sometimes come to the College to speak with the students “about the meaning of the human experience of physical labor.”<sup>199</sup> Physical labor is ultimately a part of life, and Christ too during his time on earth understood the toil of manual labor as he himself worked as a carpenter. His decision to participate in human work displays the respect he had for the worker, as Jesus “did not want to be spared the normal condition of every human being.”<sup>200</sup>

Karol was always amazed that the workers were able to help him out despite their own personal hardships. When he brought his books to work in order to study, his coworkers would

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<sup>192</sup> Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 55.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> Trigilio, Brighenti, and Toborowsky, 65.

<sup>195</sup> Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 56.

<sup>196</sup> Trigilio, Brighenti, and Toborowsky, 65.

<sup>197</sup> John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery*, 21-22.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>200</sup> John Paul II, “Jubilee of Workers,” The Holy See, April 30, 2000, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_20000501\\_jub-workers.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20000501_jub-workers.html).

say to him, “We’ll keep watch: you go ahead and read.”<sup>201</sup> Overall, his time as a laborer inspired some of his future works where he discusses the value of each person and the dignity of work. Growing up, Karol had been taught that heavy labor was a consequence of Adam and Eve’s original sin, but after his interactions with the men of Zakrzówek quarry and Solvay Chemical Factory, he began to think more deeply about the meaning of work and of the dignity of man. He concluded that work, even heavy physical labor, was “a participation in God’s creativity” and always had a purpose.<sup>202</sup> It is only when work results in exploitation and disloyalty to others that it becomes evil. Above all, no matter the nature of the work, one must remember a human person is behind the work. The transcendent dignity of a worker makes it so that he should never be reduced to a unit of labor in endless production.

### **Wojtyła’s Decision to Enter the Priesthood**

After about a year of enduring heavy physical labor, Karol was able to work an indoor job as a maintenance man on the boilers at the Solvay Chemical firm in Borek Fałęcki. He chose to work the night shift when it wasn’t so busy so he could read, pray, and study instead. His coworkers became friends who willingly watched out for Karol so he wouldn’t get caught by the Nazi patrol. They would say to him, “You go and take a break, we’ll keep an eye open.”<sup>203</sup> During this time of work and study, Wojtyła was still debating his future vocation. He was torn between the world of the theater and his devotion to Christ. He writes in *Gift and Mystery*, “I approached the idea with understandable hesitation. But later I felt it my duty to accept the invitation as part of the service involved in the Petrine ministry.”<sup>204</sup>

He further writes that although there were various individuals and experiences which guided him to the path of the priesthood, he took particular inspiration from a man known as Adam Chmielowski. Brother Saint Albert, as he was known, also had a great love for art, theater, poetry, and literature, and had a promising career ahead of him. After becoming a well-known artist, Brother Albert made the radical decision to trade it all and became a Franciscan of the Third Order in Kraków. Brother Albert started to become more aware of “the distressing situation of Kraków’s poor” and realized that “God was calling him to much more important tasks.”<sup>205</sup> Karol states that through Brother Albert, he was able to find “a real spiritual support and example in leaving behind the world of art, literature, and the theater, and in making the radical choice of the priesthood.”<sup>206</sup>

Still, it was not solely the example of Brother Albert that led him to the priesthood. George Weigel explains that “it was not so much a question of his choosing this vocation against others” but rather, when looking back at Wojtyła’s life, it became obvious that all the events of his life led him to this point: becoming an orphan, having a dedicated life of prayer, the adversity

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<sup>201</sup> John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery*, 22.

<sup>202</sup> Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 57.

<sup>203</sup> John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery*, 22.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

he faced during the occupations of the Nazis and Soviets, his love for acting, and the people in his life that influenced him. Each event and occurrence made sense in that it led him to become a priest. Throughout the spring and summer of 1942, he also had a growing feeling that he was chosen to become a priest. Wojtyła reflects in *Gift and Mystery* that although the “whole experience of the theater left a deep impression on me, at a certain point I came to realize that *this was not my real vocation*.”<sup>207</sup> He still performed with the Rhapsodic Theater, but as he became more involved as a seminarian, he could no longer dedicate so much time to acting, rehearsing, and writing scripts. His teachers and some fellow colleagues tried to convince him that his calling in life was to be an actor and told him things such as, “What are you doing? Do you want to waste your talent?” However, he could not deny his intuition, and, ultimately, young Karol made the decision to follow the priesthood during the fall of 1942.

Once Karol decided on his vocation, he joined a clandestine seminary that was led by Archbishop Sapieha, the future Cardinal Adam Stefan Sapieha.<sup>208</sup> The Nazis allowed the seminaries to continue to exist but forbade new seminarians from entering. Sapieha would disguise these new seminarians as “parish secretaries” who worked at local parishes. Unfortunately, raids were unavoidable, and students were constantly risking their lives. There was an incident where five seminarian students were caught by the Nazis and were either executed by a firing squad or sent to Auschwitz. After this, Archbishop Sapieha decided that the whole seminary had to be moved underground. Eventually Wojtyła, along with six other seminarians, would all live secretly together in Archbishop Sapieha’s residence. This was the best solution at the time, since it was becoming too dangerous for the men to live apart.

### **There is No Such Thing a Coincidence: Karol Wojtyła is Saved from Death on Two Separate Occasions**

While Father Wojtyła was living his double life as both worker and seminarian, fate confirmed his decision to become a priest on two separate occasions. On February 29, 1944, Wojtyła was walking back home from his shift at Borek Fałęcki and was suddenly hit by a German truck. A woman named Józefa Florek saw Wojtyła’s body lying in the road and immediately went to his aid. Mrs. Florek managed to flag down a German officer who surprisingly helped. The two cleaned off the blood from Karol using “some muddy water from a nearby ditch.”<sup>209</sup> After, the officer directed a passing lumber truck to take the semiconscious Wojtyła to the local hospital. In the end, the accident caused him to bear “a severe concussion, numerous cuts, and a shoulder injury.”<sup>210</sup> During his two weeks in the hospital, he meditated on Divine Providence and how surviving this accident further proved that becoming a priest was the right choice.

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>209</sup> Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 71.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

Once again, fate would work in Karol Wojtyła's favor on August 6, 1944, after the start of the Warsaw Uprising. There was a roundup ordered by the German governor of Poland to arrest all able-bodied men in Kraków in order to eliminate the odds of another Warsaw Uprising. It is estimated that around 6,000 teenage men and boys were arrested on this day, known as "Black Sunday," and later sent to concentration camps.<sup>211</sup> It seems as if Karol's life was miraculously spared on this day. Before he moved into Archbishop Sapieha's residence, he was living in a basement apartment on 10 Tyniecka Street. He was alone at home in the front room of his apartment with the door closed as Nazi soldiers went room by room searching. He was praying in his normal position of laying on the ground face down, arms out, and body positioned so he would resemble the cross when a guard stopped in front of his room, and decided, without checking, that the house was empty.<sup>212</sup> However, this did not mean that something similar could not happen in the future. If the Nazis ever discovered the secret seminary, then everyone who was a part of it could be arrested, shot, or sent to a concentration camp on the spot. Everyone in the seminary lived with this constant fear, but each was willing to become a martyr for Christ and risk their lives every day.

In January of 1945, a slight moment of hope had spread across Poland, as the Russian army had advanced east and "freed" the Poles from the Nazis. After the "liberation" in Kraków, the seminarians even offered the Russians some food and treated them as heroes. However, the Poles would quickly realize that as one totalitarian regime went out, another one had replaced it. During the Yalta war conference, Roosevelt sold out Poland to a communist future, and Stalin got his way of having political influence in Central and Eastern Europe. These countries became Stalin's Satellite Nations, and thus Churchill coined the term the "Iron Curtain." For the next 45 years, Eastern and Central Europe would have their fate sealed by the atheistic Soviets. John Paul II and Ronald Reagan would later work together to try to reverse the mistake made at Yalta. At the time, however, people could do nothing and were forced to live life under these new conditions.

The Red Army was quick in establishing its own rule of law over these countries, Poland in particular. The first goal of the communists was to dismantle the family and suppress the Church, because they knew that these two forces could provide a source of hope and strength for the oppressed people. The communists began making religion difficult to practice by "eliminating religious education from schools, heavily taxing (or bulldozing) religious properties, limiting the amount of paper the church could use for publications, censoring homilies, closing youth groups, and subjecting seminarians to military service or forced labor."<sup>213</sup> Next, the communists tried to control the dynamic of the family by creating work and school schedules that would limit the interaction parents would share with their children. Furthermore, apartments were built with small spaces to encourage small families, and methods

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<sup>211</sup> Stuart Dowell, "Black Sunday, the Largest Wave of Arrests during Nazi Occupation, Remembered for First Time," *The First News*, August 6, 2021, <https://www.thefirstnews.com/article/black-sunday-the-largest-wave-of-arrests-during-nazi-occupation-remembered-for-first-time-23796>.

<sup>212</sup> Trigilio, Brighenti, and Toborowsky, 66.

<sup>213</sup> Jason Evert and Mario Enzler, *Saint John Paul the Great: His Five Loves* (Scottsdale, AZ: Totus Tuus Press, 2014), 29.

to control the population such as birth control and abortions were widely promoted. Through these efforts, the communists attempted to destroy the Polish identity, not through genocide, but rather by crushing the spirits of the Poles.

### **Karol is Ordained a Priest**

About a year and a half after World War II came to an end, Karol was ordained as a priest on All Saints Day, November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1946. This day was only the beginning of 26-year-old Father Wojtyła's lifelong career, which would take him through the various ranks of auxiliary bishop, archbishop, cardinal, and ultimately to the papacy as Pope John Paul II. He recalls this special day of officially starting his vocation by "lying prostrate on the floor with arms outstretched in the form of a cross, awaiting the moment of the imposition of hands. It was a very moving experience! ... in accepting one's own life – like Peter – the cross of Christ and becoming with the Apostle a 'floor' for our brothers and sisters, one finds the ultimate meaning of all priestly spirituality."<sup>214</sup> His ordination to become a diocesan priest took place in the Archbishop of Kraków's private chapel. Archbishop Sapieha was also promoted to Cardinal that same year in February by Pope Pius XII. Two weeks after Wojtyła's ordination, Cardinal Sapieha sent the newly ordained priest, Father Karol, and one other younger seminarian to Rome for graduate studies. This trip to Rome would mark the first time Karol stepped foot outside of Poland.

Father Wojtyła's original plan was to attend the Polish College in Rome; however, it was at maximum capacity, so instead, the two new priests enrolled in the Angelicum, also known as the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas. While in Rome, Karol studied philosophy and moral theology. Father Wojtyła immersed himself in the writings of St. Theresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and St. Thomas Aquinas. He would end up writing his dissertation on *The Doctrine of Faith According to Saint John of the Cross*. His final product, written in Latin, was 280 pages in length. Unfortunately, Wojtyła was unable to receive his degree because he lacked the funds to print and publish his dissertation. He would instead have to wait until he returned to Kraków for Jagiellonian University to confer his degree in December of 1948.

Father Wojtyła's time in Rome was not limited only to reading, writing, and studying. Father Karol Kozłowski who was the Rector of the Kraków Seminary, told young Wojtyła that "it was more important *to learn Rome itself* than simply to study."<sup>215</sup> He took this advice and had the opportunity to visit various "historic churches, catacombs, shrines, and meet hosts of other students from all over the world."<sup>216</sup> Being surrounded by a wide array of "clergy, bishops, ambassadors, professors, students, and cardinals" from every end of the earth also presented a great opportunity for Father Wojtyła to practice his language skills.<sup>217</sup> He would later become known as "The Pope of the People" and becoming a polyglot was a large contribution to how this title came to be. His time in Rome also served as an opportunity to learn about Roman

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<sup>214</sup> John Paul, *Gift and Mystery*, 43, 46.

<sup>215</sup> Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 82.

<sup>216</sup> Trigilio, Brighenti, and Toborowsky, 87.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.



diplomacy, and it paid off in his favor as he became, “some would argue, the most diplomatic pontiff the Holy See ever had.”<sup>218</sup> Ultimately, Father Wojtyła’s two years in Rome gave him the time to prepare himself better to become a priest for his future parishioners.

### **Father Karol Wojtyła’s Time in Niegowic and St. Florian**

While Father Wojtyła was studying in Rome, communism was spreading throughout Poland. Like the Nazi regime, the Soviet communists tried to erase Polish history, culture, scholarship, and most important of all, the Polish faith. Communism and Catholicism could not exist in the same sphere as one another. The communists knew that religion could threaten their power and that people’s souls and hearts were the two things that they could not control. In fact, Father Wojtyła experienced firsthand communist efforts to eradicate religion during his time in Niegowic. This small village about fifteen miles east of Kraków was where Father Wojtyła’s first priestly assignment took place.

As Wojtyła became more involved in building up Niegowic’s parish committee and introducing communities into the town, such as the drama group and “living rosary” group, the communists put Wojtyła on their radar. There were times when the secret police were able to “infiltrate and plant moles” in these Catholic groups in an effort to break them apart.<sup>219</sup> There were also incidents of blackmail and torture to try to obtain information about the workings of the groups. In one case, the Soviets captured a young man who was working directly with Father Wojtyła to help type up his doctoral thesis. They ended up beating the captured student because he would not reveal any information about Wojtyła’s youth groups, which they were hoping to infiltrate. Father Wojtyła comforted this young man by saying, “Don’t cry, Stanisław, this must end one day. They’ll finish themselves off eventually.”<sup>220</sup>

This small country town where Wojtyła’s first assignment took place was not in the best shape. The people of Niegowic were living under immense poverty. The inhabitants had neither a proper water system nor a sewage system, and for electricity they had to use kerosene lamps. This did not bother Wojtyła. He accepted “the appointment with joy” and kissed the ground of the Niegowic territory upon his arrival.<sup>221</sup> John Paul II once stated that kissing the ground upon arrival was a gesture he learned from Saint John Mary Vinney, and it would be a gesture that he continued throughout his papacy. In fact, this act even became what some would recognize as the trademark of his papacy.

During his time there he served as parochial vicar, or simply put, an assistant pastor, and became a religion teacher overseeing five elementary schools which were part of the Niegowic parish. He upheld the typical duties of a priest, such as baptisms, marriages, funerals, absolving sins, and the like. He also made the effort to connect with the parishioners of Niegowic by visiting their homes or helping with their farm work. Wojtyła’s time in Niegowic was brief and

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>220</sup> Maciej Muller, “Jak Rodził Się Wojtyła Polityk,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, October 16, 2018, <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/jak-rodzil-sie-wojtyla-polityk-156139>.

<sup>221</sup> John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery*, 61.

only lasted a little over a year before he was transferred to a university parish known as St. Florian's Church. Here he would become a student chaplain and interact mainly with young university students and intellectuals. At the beginning of his ministry at St. Florian, he would meet with a group of about 20 young adults who got so close that they referred to their group as *Rodzinka*, or "the little family." Another similar group referred to themselves as *Paczka* which means "package" or "packet."

Eventually, these groups grew in popularity and acquired about 200 young people. This community that formed became known as Wojtyła's *środowisko*, which translates literally to mean "environment," though John Paul II "prefers the more humanistic word *milieu*."<sup>222</sup> This *milieu* would meet for prayer, weekday mass, and philosophical discussion to cover topics such as the theological works of St. Thomas Aquinas. Father Wojtyła's groups turned out to be a saving grace during a time when the communists were actively oppressing the church. Wojtyła put in this effort to create these "free spaces" because he deeply cared for young people and knew they were the future. It was critical that the Church should continue to live within the young, upcoming generation.

### **Wujek Lolek -- Uncle Chuck and Young People**

Father Wojtyła also saw the benefit of meeting with his youth groups and *środowisko* for more interactive events such as skiing, kayaking, camping, and hiking. During these outdoor trips, Father Wojtyła acquired the name Wujek Lolek, or Uncle Chuck. This was not simply out of endearment for Father Wojtyła, but also for the safety of the youth group, who could not risk getting caught by the secret police. It was forbidden for priests to be spotted with their students in public. To conceal his identity, Father Wojtyła could not wear his priestly garb during these trips, nor could he be called by his official title of "Father" or "Reverend." The name Wujek (uncle) Lolek made it appear as if he were just on a trip with his nieces and nephews. The youth group trips to the wilderness would be a time filled with reflection, prayer, and teachings led by Father Wojtyła. It was a safe environment where students could express themselves freely, despite living in a communist-controlled society where dissenting opinions and perspectives were often suppressed.

At times, the students would get creative and celebrate mass by any means they could, such as "using an overturned canoe as an altar, with two paddles lashed together to form a cross."<sup>223</sup> One camp counselor in Colorado who leads "Camp Wojtyła," an outdoor faith program located in the Rocky Mountains, is quoted saying, "He wanted people to experience the freedom that Christ is, and one of those ways to experience that freedom is being in the freedom of the wilderness."<sup>224</sup> He would continue leading these outdoor excursions up until he was elected pope. These excursions proved to be a great way to momentarily escape the daunting

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<sup>222</sup> Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 98.

<sup>223</sup> Evert and Enzler, 37.

<sup>224</sup> Hillary Mast, "John Paul II Remembered for Influential Love of Youth, Nature," Catholic News Agency, April 26, 2014, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/29507/john-paul-ii-remembered-for-influential-love-of-youth-nature>.

ways of life under the Soviet regime, and were loved by his students. He was able to create an environment where the youth could feel what living in an independent Poland might be like, despite having lived in a captive nation their whole lives. Due to Wojtyła's leadership and encouragement to have freedom of thought, "some of the future leaders of Solidarity were on those camping trips."<sup>225</sup>

There was no doubt that Father Wojtyła's charismatic personality made an impression on all the young people he encountered. Whether he was leading one of his study or theater groups, teaching theology, guiding marriage preparation courses, or simply preaching about the gospel, there was a zeal about him that influenced and attracted young people. During these times, Father Wojtyła could fight communism "through future lawyers, physicists, doctors, and teachers," by instilling values, morals, and respect for the Church into these future leaders.<sup>226</sup> The learning centers and study groups formed by Father Wojtyła provided great wisdom for students, and also became a place for students to meet their future life partners or decide that the consecrated life was the vocation for them.

Wojtyła created these safe environments where students felt free and could express themselves, despite living in the midst of a communist-controlled society. It was critical to preach the message of the gospel to young people during times when atheism ruled. Karol Wojtyła made a great effort to involve young people in the church, and even continued these efforts when he became Pope by creating World Youth Day. The celebration of World Youth Day started small. It all began in 1984, when he invited a group of young people to meet for prayer in St. Peter's Square on Palm Sunday. This single event would later develop into the International Youth Day that is celebrated today, where millions of young Catholics worldwide meet every three years in a different country for prayer, community, and worship. Pope John Paul II's relationship with the youth was truly something unique and remembered as a characteristic of his papacy.

## **Wojtyła's Second Doctorate and Days as a Professor**

Karol Wojtyła's education did not stop in Rome. He continued to study sacred theology and philosophy at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. Father Wojtyła was advised to take this two-year academic leave in order to receive his second doctorate after two years of teaching the youth at St. Florian. After writing his thesis, *An Evaluation of the Possibility of Constructing a Christian Ethics on the Basis of the System of Max Scheler*, in 1953 he was qualified to start teaching as a professor of ethics and moral theology. This thesis was one of the last theses granted before the communists took over and closed the theology and related departments at Jagiellonian University.<sup>227</sup> In controlling Jagiellonian University, the Soviets hoped not only to eradicate Polish culture, but also to prevent people from learning about faith and reason. The

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<sup>225</sup> Simone Bloom Nathan, "Leadership - John Paul II - The Millennium Pope," PBS (Public Broadcasting Service, 2014), <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/leadership/pope/>.

<sup>226</sup> Trigilio, Brighenti, and Toborowsky, *John Paul II*.

<sup>227</sup> Evert and Enzler, 34.

farther people were from being able to think for themselves, the easier it would be for the communists to take control of the people.

Karol began his journey as a professor of moral theology and social ethics shortly after he received his second doctorate. Wojtyła was able to fight communism in his own way, through classroom discussions of philosophers such as Plato, Kant, Aquinas, Augustine, Aristotle, and the like.<sup>228</sup> He would initially teach at the Seminary of Kraków and later transfer to the Catholic University of Lublin in October of 1954. Here he would eventually become the chair of the University's ethics department after two years of starting out as a temporary professor. He anonymously donated his salary towards a fund that helped students who could not afford tuition. Professor Wojtyła also used this time to focus on his writing. In fact, a great number of his pieces were published during this period, such as various poems, academic pieces on theology and philosophy, and his well-known literary piece *Love and Responsibility*, in which he dives into the value each human person possesses.

*Love and Responsibility* was Wojtyła's first major published book and set the precedent for his future speeches and homilies on human rights. It was through this work that he began to thoroughly explore the nature and anthropology of the human person. Although in his book he focuses mainly on human love, attraction, relationships, and sexuality, as he was a professor surrounded by young people looking for love, he uses the example of love specifically to explain the value of a person. For example, when a person truly loves and respects another person, that love is reflected by recognizing that person's dignity, which can only be realized when he or she is not treated as an object that is used as a means to an end.<sup>229</sup> This was critical to understand, as the Marxist ideology treated each person as an instrument to achieve the goal of economic production.

Professor Wojtyła's lectures at Lublin University were said to have been engaging and to have left an impression on students. He was able to captivate his young audience so much that apparently students would "pile into his classrooms to hear his lectures and lined the walls and windowsills to hear his thought on life, love, and everything in between."<sup>230</sup> One former student of his stated, "His writing was rather more difficult to absorb and digest, but his talks were fascinating."<sup>231</sup> While he was conducting his lectures, seminars, or class exercises, he continued to pursue his priestly duties. At times, some students from Lublin University would accompany and join him during his faith-based outdoor excursions and summer trips. He would work at the University, traveling back and forth to Lublin and Kraków, until he was elected pope in 1978.

### **Becoming Auxiliary Bishop and Archbishop of Kraków**

On July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1958, at only 38 years old, Karol Wojtyła was already set to become a bishop. Wojtyła was appointed auxiliary bishop of Kraków for Eugeniusz Baziak by Pope Pius

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<sup>228</sup> George Weigel, *The End and the Beginning: Pope John Paul II--The Victory of Freedom, the Last Years, the Legacy* (New York, NY: Image Books, 2010), 47.

<sup>229</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility* (London, England: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1981), 25.

<sup>230</sup> Evert and Enzler, 35.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

XII on July 4<sup>th</sup> and would officially become the youngest bishop in Poland. Wojtyła questioned the decision of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, believing that he was too young for this important role. Wyszyński responded to Wojtyła's hesitation and said, "That is a weakness which can soon be remedied. Please do not oppose the will of the Holy Father."<sup>232</sup> Wojtyła no longer questioned the appointment and replied to Wyszyński saying, "Where do I sign?"<sup>233</sup> Finally, on September 28, 1958, Wojtyła was ordained a bishop in the Wawel Cathedral of Kraków at the tomb of Saint Stanisław. He was surrounded by his "friends, academic colleagues, and, of course, the members of his *środowisko* on this special day.

A little over six years later in June of 1964, Wojtyła was appointed as archbishop; however, his appointment was not conventional in its nature. During the period of his election, the communist-controlled Polish government and the Polish Church were split on whether the State first needed to approve the bishop candidates up for election. Despite their rivalries, the Communist Party surprisingly still allowed the Polish Church to function, albeit with their constant efforts to undermine and penetrate it. In the end, it was decided that the communists would permit the Church to nominate candidates for bishops and priests, yet still held the power to reject potential candidates they didn't approve of. The Communist Party did not have the power to force a candidate upon the Church. The process consisted of Cardinal Wyszyński sending the name of a potential candidate to Rome, which would then, if approved, be sent to the regime for final approval.

When it came time to officially elect the future Archbishop of Kraków, the Communist Party did not have the favor of the Church in mind. It was in their interest to elect whom they perceived to be the weakest possible candidate. The Department of Religious Denominations, along with the chief ideologist of the Polish Communist Party, Zenon Klisko, had their decision set on electing auxiliary bishop Karol Wojtyła. The Communist Party greatly miscalculated Wojtyła's character and thought he would be a weak archbishop. They believed that Wojtyła "expressed little interest in mundane politics and could be manipulated easily."<sup>234</sup> Perhaps his young age, as well as his background in theology, literature, and poetry, gave the impression he had no interest in politics and would be easy to control.<sup>235</sup> George Weigel further explains, "Kilszko and the comrades seem to have been convinced that Wojtyła could be manipulated."<sup>236</sup> Regardless of how the Communists eventually came to this conclusion, it was no doubt a great miscalculation.

Zenon Kliszko proclaimed, "I'm waiting for Wojtyła, and I'll continue to veto names until I get him."<sup>237</sup> For the next eighteen months, the chief ideologist went as far as vetoing seven potential bishops until Karol Wojtyła became the last and final option.<sup>238</sup> Little did the

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Andrew Nagorski, "John Paul II and Communism," NBCNews.com, April 2, 2005, <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna3276657>.

<sup>235</sup> Weigel, *The End and the Beginning*, 69.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Evert and Mario Enzler, 40.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

Communists know they would help elect the man who would years later help topple the regime they stood for. Some would argue that this is a prime example of how Divine Will always manages to prevail. With Wojtyła's new appointment and title, he now became an even greater target for the Soviets. Although Wojtyła had been under surveillance since he became a priest in 1946, the spying would intensify as he grew in rank. George Weigel writes how archbishop Wojtyła's "residence at Franciszkańska 3 was thoroughly bugged" and his "car was constantly tailed."<sup>239</sup> This spying by the Polish secret services only got worse in the late 60s after he officially became a cardinal.

## **The Challenges of Cardinal Wojtyła**

Wojtyła was appointed as a cardinal in June of 1967, and served in that office for the next 11 years of his life before he took on the papacy. During this time, he was considered an even greater political opponent against the communist regime and, as a result, became more heavily monitored. Two documents from the archives of the Institute of National Memory illustrate the extent to which the communists spied on Cardinal Wojtyła. The first document is dated October 9, 1969, and contains a set of questions the spies were tasked with discovering about this cardinal. The spies' list includes "questions about his intellectual capacity, courage, and fidelity to the Church; about his attitude toward the Vatican and the 'socialist reality' of Poland."<sup>240</sup> This appears to be nothing out of the ordinary, but what is more shocking is the second document containing 98 questions instructing the spies to figure out every detail of his personal life. The document contained questions from, "What time does he get up on weekdays and on Sunday?" and "What does he do after he gets up, and in what order?" to more personal, unnecessary details such as, "How often does he shave, and with what implements?" and "What are the toiletries that he uses?" The inquiries did not stop there, as they also cared to discover: Who did his laundry? Where did he keep his keys? What kind of alcohol did he drink? How much and how often? What time does he eat his lunch? Does he enjoy playing bridge or other games such as chess? Who was his dentist? What medicine did he take? etc.<sup>241</sup>

Unfortunately, these details regarding the cardinal's personal life could not be discovered without the help of the Polish clergy who collaborated with the communists. It is reported that about ten percent of the clergy worked with the communist authorities in some form or another.<sup>242</sup> Despite these communist efforts to infiltrate his life, Wojtyła continued his mission as the defender of Poland, which experienced more religious freedom than its neighbors, thanks to its robust Catholic community and the immense efforts of Primate Wyszyński. In fact, another main objective of the communists was to cause a divide between the two leaders, Wojtyła and

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<sup>239</sup> Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 226.

<sup>240</sup> Gigi Riva, "Exclusive from Poland: Who Was Spying on Karol Wojtyła," *Chiesa*, January 23, 2007, <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/113441%26eng%3Dy.html>.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>242</sup> "Polish Historian Reveals John Paul II Was Spied On by the Priests Closest to Him," *La Stampa*, May 29, 2012, <https://www.lastampa.it/vatican-insider/en/2012/05/29/news/polish-historian-reveals-john-paul-ii-was-spied-on-by-the-priests-closest-to-him-1.36482027/>.

Wyszynski. However, Wojtyła never let this happen, and made sure to “remain the number two man in the public eye.”<sup>243</sup> Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz recalls the friendship and mentorship shared between Primate Wyszynski and Wojtyła in his book, *A Life with Karol*: “The most obvious proof of their excellent relations was the fact the archbishop of Kraków (Wojtyła) never failed to demonstrate his great respect for, and transparent loyalty to, the primate... In addition, the two cardinals had found a way of dividing up their roles and tasks that made it extremely easy for them to work together as pastors. The primate set the direction, the overall strategy, while Wojtyła articulated the theory behind it.”<sup>244</sup> This utmost respect for Wyszynski continued into John Paul II’s papacy.

### **The Election of Pope John Paul II and His Powerful Legacy**

Cardinal Karol Wojtyła officially was elected as pope on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1978. During one of his first public speeches as pope, he praised Wyszynski and his leadership: “Venerable and beloved Cardinal Primate, allow me to tell you just what I think. This Polish pope, full of the fear of God, but also of trust, is beginning a new pontificate, and would not be on Peter’s chair were it not for your faith which did not retreat before prison and suffering. Were it not for your heroic hope, your unlimited trust in the Mother of the Church!”<sup>245</sup> Wyszynski also respected his student and told Wojtyła upon his election as pope, “If the Lord has called you, you must take the Church into the third millennium!”<sup>246</sup> Thus, his journey as Pope John Paul II began.

When Archbishop Wojtyła rose up to the ranks of Pope John Paul II, there were mixed reactions from the Soviets regarding the news. Some were grateful that he was finally working outside of Poland, while other communists knew that having a pope from behind the Iron Curtain would only cause more problems. On the evening of October 22<sup>nd</sup>, during his inauguration homily, he indirectly called out the communists. He proclaimed, “Be not afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of states, economic, and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization, and development. Be not afraid. Christ knows ‘what is in man.’ He alone knows it.”<sup>247</sup>

These words can be interpreted as signaling to his listeners not to be afraid of the communist regime and to challenge the state of the world in its current economic, social, and political form. He then proceeded to address his fellow Polish compatriots:

I speak to you, my dear fellow-countrymen, pilgrims from Poland...Everything that I could say would fade into insignificance compared with what my heart feels, and your hearts feel, at this moment. So let us leave aside words. Let there remain just great silence before God, the silence that becomes prayer. I ask you: be with me! At Jasna Gora and everywhere. Do

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<sup>243</sup> Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 230.

<sup>244</sup> Monika Jablonska, “John Paul II’s Hero: Stefan Wyszynski Faced Communism with Clear Eyes and a Steel Spine,” NCR, May 18, 2021, <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/prime-of-the-millennium>.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> John Paul II, “Homily of his Holiness John Paul II for the Inauguration of his Pontificate,” The Holy See, October 22, 1978, sec. 7, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1978/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19781022\\_inizio-pontificato.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1978/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19781022_inizio-pontificato.html).

not cease to be with the Pope who today prays with the words of the poet: "Mother of God, you who defend Bright Czestochowa and shine at Ostrabrama.

John Paul II recognized the importance of what it meant for Poles to have a Polish pope during these times. It was an exceptionally powerful moment that will be remembered in Polish history forever. It was, however, just as important for all others in the "Intermarium" region. Toward the end of his inaugural speech, he added greetings in Czechoslovakian, Russian, Ukrainian, and Lithuanian as well as in German, Spanish, and Portuguese. He then also addressed all Christians from all dominations, for prayer: "I open my heart to all my Brothers of the Christian Churches and Communities." Lastly, he closed out his homily by addressing all religions and all people:

And I also appeal to all men—to every man (and with what veneration the apostle of Christ must utter this word: "man"!)

— pray for me!

— help me to be able to serve you! Amen.<sup>248</sup>

With the inclusivity of all peoples in his opening homily as pope, it is no surprise that John Paul II is recognized as the "Pope of the People." He earned this title because of his mission to become a universal church leader and appeal to all of humanity. He was the first pope in history to travel around the world at such an extensive rate. He made 104 overseas trips during his papacy and managed to visit 129 countries; this is more than all his previous predecessors combined.<sup>249</sup> According to an estimate, these trips totaled approximately 775,000 miles, or 31 times around the earth.<sup>250</sup> In addition, people from various nations felt a connection to him because he was able to speak the gospel in their native tongue. John Paul II was so talented that he spoke eight languages fluently, as well as various dialects and multiple other languages on a proficient scale. The languages he could speak fluently included: Polish, Latin, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, English, and German.

John Paul II is remembered as a pope who had a great love for all people, religions, and nations. During his papacy, he felt it important for his mission to extend outside of the Catholic Church and to connect, or repair, relations with all faiths. His visits with Jewish and Muslim leaders would reflect this. On April 13, 1986, he became the first pope to visit a synagogue since the days of Saint Peter. Young Wojtyła saw firsthand the discrimination that Jewish people were facing during the Nazi occupation and grew up witnessing the sudden disappearance of his Jewish friends and neighbors. Throughout his papacy, John Paul II went to great lengths to try to improve the relations between Jews and Catholics. At his visit to the synagogue, he referred to the Jewish people as the "elder brothers" of Christians and focused on common themes between

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<sup>248</sup> John Paul II, "Mass at the Beginning of the Pontificate," The Holy See, October 21, 1978, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1978/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19781022\\_inizio-pontificato.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1978/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19781022_inizio-pontificato.html).

<sup>249</sup> Evert and Enzler, 67.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.



Judaism and Christianity.<sup>251</sup> He also condemned anti-Semitism and commemorated the lives of the innocent people lost in the Holocaust. He later would make even greater efforts to strengthen Jewish-Christian relations by establishing diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Israel.

This outreach also continued between Catholics and Muslims. During his second visit to the Middle East, on May 6, 2001, John Paul II entered the Olmayyad Mosque in the center of Damascus to show his respect for the Islamic faith. Aware of the conflicts between Christians and Muslims for centuries, he hoped the sides could reach mutual forgiveness and move forward as partners. Years prior, in 1985, John Paul II also attracted a crowd of 80,000 Muslim Youth during his speech in Morocco, where he highlighted the similarities between the two religions.

John Paul II would conduct similar meetings with other faiths, including Orthodox, Protestant, and Hindu among others. However, his ability to reach out to non-Catholics did not stop there. On October 27, 1986, John Paul II started the tradition of an interfaith peace gathering in which leaders from various faiths would come together in Assisi, Italy, and pray for peace in the world. This seemingly peaceful act did not come without controversy; there was a debate on how Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Shintoists, and other faiths could come together to pray, when their fundamental beliefs were so different from one another. One main concern voiced before the gathering was that the joint prayer would be “syncretistic or reductionist.”<sup>252</sup> The Pope then explained that “we were not gathering ‘to pray together,’ but we were gathering ‘to be together to pray.’”<sup>253</sup> He believed in showing the world that religion does not have to be a cause of conflict and that peace can present itself in a way which is “not a result of negotiations, political compromises or economic bargainings.”<sup>254</sup> Ultimately, John Paul II wanted the world to witness prayer, peace, and collective understanding during the high tensions of the Cold War.

The preceding examples demonstrate how John Paul II was willing to keep an open dialogue with other faiths and showcased his great respect for religious freedom. No other pope made such an effort to connect with the whole world as he did.

## **A Glimpse at the End of His Life**

Towards the end of his life, John Paul II suffered from Parkinson’s Disease, a brain disorder associated with shaking and difficulty coordinating movement as it affects the nervous system. He began showing symptoms of Parkinson’s in the early 1990s but there was no official confirmation from the Vatican regarding his illness. Despite his visible difficulties with speech and walking, he kept up with his rigorous travel schedule and papal duties until February of 2005, when he was hospitalized with the flu.

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<sup>251</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, “Pope John Paul II: Relations with Jews and Israel,” Pope John Paul II: Relations with Jews & Israel, April 11, 2005, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/pope-john-paul-ii-relations-with-jews-and-israel>.

<sup>252</sup> William F. Murphy, “Remembering Assisi after 20 Years,” *America Magazine*, October 23, 2006, <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/588/article/remembering-assisi-after-20-years>.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Roberto Morozzo Rocca, “28 Years Ago the World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi,” NEWS Community of Sant'Egidio, October 27, 2014, <https://archive.santegidio.org/pagelID/3/langID/en/itemID/10003/28-years-ago-the-World-Day-of-Prayer-for-Peace-in-Assisi-Peace-is-a-workshop-open-to-all.html>.

John Paul's life came to a heroic end at the age of 84, two months after his hospitalization on April 2, 2005, at 9:37 pm, when he had uttered his final words only moments before, "Let me go to my Father's house."<sup>255</sup> Alas, his soul is there now, but his legacy and example on earth continue to live on. On April 8<sup>th</sup>, over 3 million people gathered for his funeral at St. Peter's Basilica to say their final goodbyes. John Paul II touched the lives of many, from all walks of life, all over the world, young and old alike. There was something charismatic and truly different about John Paul II compared to other leaders, which made him go down in history as "the Great." John Paul II's papacy lasted 26 years and was the third-longest in history.

Only a few weeks after his death, Pope Benedict XVI proclaimed that the process for the beatification and canonization of John Paul II would not have to undergo the typical five-year waiting period. Six years later on May 1, 2011, Pope John Paul II was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI and canonized only three years later, on April 27, 2014. John Paul II's legacy, example, and words continue to resonate even now.

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<sup>255</sup> "About St. John Paul II: Saint John Paul II National Shrine," St. John Paul II | Saint John Paul II National Shrine, 2023, <https://www.jp2shrine.org/en/about/jp2bio.html>.

### **Chapter 3: The Impact of John Paul II's 1979 Pilgrimage: Influencing the Hearts and Minds of People**

*This chapter will explore John Paul II's 1979 pilgrimage to Poland and how his visit sparked the beginning of the end of communism. The words he spoke throughout these nine days gave people the hope that this period in their lives would only be temporary. His pilgrimage attracted thirteen million Poles, one-third of the population, to watch him in person, with millions more tuning in through their televisions and radios.<sup>256</sup> Finally, citizens began to realize just how greatly they outnumbered their government. For the first time in years, Poles were gaining the courage to voice their opinions and not live in the shadow of the communist regime. John Paul II's example awakened the Pole's longing for freedom and ultimately paved the way for the creation of the non-violent social movement and free trade union known as "Solidarity," or Solidarność. The Union began with the help of a common man, a shipyard electrician known as Lech Wałęsa. Wałęsa himself stated that had John Paul II not visited Poland in 1979, there would be no Solidarity movement, as there had been many unsuccessful tries before 1980 to start a similar labor union. Without John Paul II's words of encouragement and message of hope to mobilize people, the reign of communism could have lasted for decades longer or ended much more violently.*

#### **The Beginning of the End of Communism: The Pilgrimage that Changed the Course of History**

If the communists knew just how great the impact John Paul II would have on Poland, they never would have allowed his 1979 pilgrimage to take place. In fact, they still tried to do everything in their power to stop it. At the time, Leonid Brezhnev was in contact with Poland's general secretary, Edward Gierek, and pressured him to close the borders so John Paul II could not enter Poland. After Gierek explained that this could not be done, Brezhnev insisted to Gierek that John Paul II should fake having an illness. He stated, "Tell the pope – he's a wise man – he can declare publicly that he can't come due to an illness."<sup>257</sup> Once again, Gierek responded that canceling the pope's visit was not a possible option. How could Poland, even under communist occupation, deny the visit of the first Polish pope in history? Brezhnev replied angrily to Gierek, "Gomulka was a better communist [than you], because he didn't receive Paul VI in Poland, and nothing awful happened. The Poles have survived the refusal to admit the pope once; they'll survive it a second time."<sup>258</sup> Luckily, the Poles did not have to miss out on his visit, as an unexpected turn of events allowed John Paul II to visit for nine days.

When Wojtyła was originally planning his trip to Poland, he intended to come for only two days to commemorate the nine hundredth anniversary of Saint Stanislaus's martyrdom. The communists did not like this idea, however, because the saint was remembered as a symbol of

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<sup>256</sup> Evert and Enzler, *Saint John Paul the Great*, 65.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid, 64.

“religious resistance to unjust tyranny.”<sup>259</sup> Stanislaus of Szczepanów was the bishop of Kraków, Poland’s patron saint, and a Christian martyr who was slain by Poland’s King, King Bolesław II the Bold, for his fearless preaching of the gospel. Stanislaus is remembered as a symbol of protecting religious freedom. The communists did not want to draw any parallels between Stanislaus, John Paul II, and their oppressive regime, so instead, they adjusted John Paul II’s initial two-day visit in May into a nine-day visit in June. John Paul II still managed to include Stanislaus’s message in each one of his homilies during the pilgrimage. On June 5<sup>th</sup> in his address to the Polish Episcopal Conference, John Paul II specifically highlighted the importance of this Polish martyr and Polish symbol:

In the Church in my motherland, the year 1979 is the year of Saint Stanislaus. Nine hundred years have passed since his death at the hands of King Boleslaw the Bold at Skalka. The death of the Bishop who proclaimed to everyone—not excluding the King—the truth of the faith and of Christian morality had a significance of special witness to the Gospel and to Christ himself. Stanislaus of Szczepanów suffered death in such manner that, in the Church's tradition, he was included among the martyrs.

The Church needs a hierarchical order if she is to serve people and society effectively in the field of the moral order. Saint Stanislaus is the expression, symbol and patron of this order. Given that the moral order is at the basis of human culture, the national tradition, rightly sees Stanislaus' place at the basis of Polish culture. The Polish Episcopate must add to its present mission and ministry a particular solicitude for the whole Polish cultural heritage, of which we know to what degree it is permeated by the light of Christianity. It is, also well known that it is precisely culture that is the first and fundamental proof of the nation's identity.<sup>260</sup>

The bishops also responded to the communist resistance by including a month-long dedication in the church to Stanislaus. Devotion to Saint Stanislaus was undoubtedly “a subtle form of political protest” against the communists.<sup>261</sup>

The first stop of the nine-day pilgrimage began in Warsaw on June 2, 1979, where a crowd of about 300,000 Poles gathered in Victory Square to hear the pope’s famous homily.<sup>262</sup> Hundreds of thousands more crowded into nearby streets, and pilgrims from all over the world also were present to celebrate the pope’s visit. The number of visitors would only grow, as an estimated 13 million Poles, 1/3 of the total population, went to see Pope John Paul II speak throughout the country during his 9-day pilgrimage.<sup>263</sup> The atmosphere at the time was often described as

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> John Paul II, “To the 169th Plenary Assembly of the Polish Episcopal Conference,” Vatican Records, June 5, 1979, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/june/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19790605\\_polonia-jasna-gora-episcopato.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19790605_polonia-jasna-gora-episcopato.html).

<sup>261</sup> George Weigel, *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), 99.

<sup>262</sup> Evert and Enzler, *Saint John Paul the Great*, 64.

<sup>263</sup> Telewizja Polska, “Poles Commemorate Pivotal 1979 Visit of Pope John Paul II,” TVP World, June 2, 2019, <https://tvpworld.com/42906355/poles-commemorate-pivotal-1979-visit-of-pope-john-paul-ii#:~:text=During%20the%20nine%20day%20pilgrimage,Paul%20II%20at%20that%20time>.

“electric.” At each destination, “Pictures of John Paul II were displayed in windows; people waved flags and carried flowers as they sang and chanted joyously.”<sup>264</sup> After more than thirty years of living under oppression, people finally began to feel as if there was hope, and the pope was the symbol of that hope.

The Communists, surprisingly, allowed the pope’s visit to be televised. Millions of people were watching his homilies at home in front of their television screens. Usually, the communists were against the Church using the media, but they hoped that if the pope were televised, fewer people would show up in person to his homilies. This obviously did not work, as millions accumulated throughout the 9 days to see him. To be sure, the reported television coverage of John Paul II’s homilies was of poor quality. The paranoid communist coverage would rarely focus in on the pope speaking, and if it did, it was a very zoomed-in image of him. Furthermore, they refused to show the massive size of the crowds he gathered or the young people that were present, but rather preferred to pan the cameras onto “the religious, handicapped, and elderly” people present.<sup>265</sup> All of this proves the communists feared the power Pope John Paul II had to influence people. They were terrified he would awaken the Poles’ longing for freedom and ultimately begin to challenge their power. This is precisely what he did, and it all began the moment he took the stage at Victory Square.

### **The Powerful Words Spoken During His Homilies: Analyzing John Paul II’s Homily at Victory Square in Warsaw**

During his 9-day pilgrimage, John Paul II never spoke directly against the communists, but rather in cryptic messages which signaled to his audience that there was, in fact, freedom, and that life without oppression was possible. During these times, Poles were hesitant to speak aloud on topics such as religion, history, and government; they were accustomed to speaking “in code” and could decipher John Paul II’s homilies, which spoke indirectly against the regime. For example, the message of his first homily in Warsaw highlights the history of Poland, Polish culture, the sacrifices Poles have made for their country, and how Christ is essential to understanding the history and future of Poland. There was a universal Catholic message in this homily, but also an underlying message targeting the socio-political situation in Poland. By interpretation, his message could get through to the people. Paul Kengor writes that “every Pole knew to connect his words to the struggle against [this] atheistic communist ideology.”<sup>266</sup> The following analysis and quotes from his Victory Square speech highlight this point:

We know that the recently deceased Paul VI, the first pilgrim Pope after so many centuries, ardently desired to set foot on the soil of Poland, especially at Jasna Gora (the Bright Mountain).

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<sup>264</sup> Monika Jablonska, *Wind from Heaven: John Paul II, the Poet Who Became Pope* (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2017), 5.

<sup>265</sup> Evert and Enzler, *Saint John Paul the Great*, 65.

<sup>266</sup> Paul Kengor, “The Fall of Communism and John Paul II’s Push,” *Catholic Digest*, November 7, 2019, <https://www.catholicdigest.com/amp/news/nationworld/the-fall-of-communism-and-john-paul-iis-push/>.

Today it is granted to me to fulfil this desire of the deceased Pope Paul VI in the midst of you, beloved sons and daughters of my motherland. [ . . . ] it was for me to fulfill that desire, the desire that Paul VI had been unable to carry out at the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland.

I must nonetheless with all of you ask myself why, precisely in 1978, after so many centuries of a well-established tradition in this field, a son of the Polish Nation, of the land of Poland, was called to the chair of Saint Peter.

These lines at the beginning of the homily send a message that highlights the desires of the previous pope, Paul VI, to visit Poland; however, he was ultimately unable to do so under the restrictive communist regime. It seems as if Pope John Paul II points this out because he knows, as well as his fellow countrymen, that if he were not Polish, he would not be there in that moment either. He recognizes that having a Slavic pope who could represent Poland and all other nations behind the Iron Curtain was something chosen by the Divine Will. He possibly also mentioned Paul VI's denied visit to give hope to the people, by showing that what was once not possible had become possible with his papacy.

Next in the homily, Pope John Paul II highlights the importance of keeping Christ in each person's life, and the role that Christ has played throughout history, specifically to the history of Poland. He indirectly addresses the atheistic communist regime's efforts to keep faith from being a part of people's lives. John Paul II reinforces the notion that without Christ people cannot live out their true calling, nor understand who they are as people or their inherent human dignity. Christ is the key to life, and without Him, life becomes much more difficult. John Paul II further states that keeping Christ out of the history of man "is an act against man," because it forces people to live in darkness about the truth. This is precisely why communism failed: it did not understand that life without Christ, or without God, is incomplete. For the people of Poland, a majority-Catholic nation, Christ is what many believed brought them through all the hardships the country faced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and earlier.

Furthermore, the suppression of faith by the communist regime lies behind John Paul II's mention of Stanisław of Szczepanów. The saint is remembered for standing up against the evils of the king and his unjust government, but also, in a larger context, he is remembered as a significant symbol in Polish history. It was critical to keep the memory alive of historical figures in Poland during a period when the regime tried to erase all traces of Poland's past. In addition to Polish history, John Paul II mentions the importance of Polish culture, tradition, and language throughout this homily.

It is good that my pilgrimage to Poland on the ninth centenary of the martyrdom of Saint Stanisław should fall in the Pentecost period and on the solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity.

In the apostles who receive the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost are spiritually present in a way all their successors, all the Bishops, including those whose task it has been for a thousand years to proclaim the Gospel on Polish soil. Among them was this Stanisław of

Szczepanów, who paid with his blood for his mission on the episcopal chair of Kraków nine centuries ago.

The day of Pentecost is the birthday of the faith and of the Church in our land of Poland also. It is the proclamation of the mighty works of God in our Polish language also. It is the beginning of Christianity in the life of our nation also, in its history, its culture, its trials.

To Poland the Church brought Christ, the key to understanding that great and fundamental reality that is man. For man cannot be fully understood without Christ. Or rather, man is incapable of understanding himself fully without Christ. He cannot understand who he is, nor what his true dignity is, nor what his vocation is, nor what his final end is. He cannot understand any of this without Christ.

Therefore Christ cannot be kept out of the history of man in any part of the globe, at any longitude or latitude of geography. The exclusion of Christ from the history of man is an act against man. Without Christ it is impossible to understand the history of Poland, especially the history of the people who have passed or are passing through this land. The history of people. The history of the nation is above all the history of people. And the history of each person unfolds in Jesus Christ. In him it becomes the history of salvation.

It is necessary to follow the traces of what, or rather who, Christ was for the sons and daughters of this land down the generations. Not only for those who openly believed in him and professed him with the faith of the Church, but also for those who appeared to be at a distance, outside the Church. For those who doubted or were opposed.

At the same time man cannot be understood apart from this community that is constituted by the nation. Of course it is not the only community, but it is a special community, perhaps that most intimately linked with the family, the most important for the spiritual history of man. It is therefore impossible without Christ to understand the history of the Polish nation—this great thousand-year-old community—that is so profoundly decisive for me and each one of us.

John Paul II believed that Christ revealed himself throughout the history of Poland and furthermore, in each Pole, alive and dead. To understand Poles, their country, and their history, neither Christ nor Christianity could be forgotten. He also highlighted how Christ is essential for the future of Poland. John Paul II implied that as the communists tried to remove Christ from the lives of Poles, they also were attempting to remove a key part of the Polish identity. The next part of the homily highlights how Christ is present throughout the history of Poland, in every historic event, and in each individual person. In addition, he speaks of the strength of Warsaw in 1944, when she was left behind to fend for her own.

It is impossible without Christ to understand this nation with its past so full of splendour and also of terrible difficulties. It is impossible to understand this city, Warsaw, the capital of Poland, that undertook in 1944 an unequal battle against the aggressor, a battle in which it was abandoned by the allied powers, a battle in which it was buried under its own ruins—if it

is not remembered that under those same ruins there was also the statue of Christ the Saviour with his cross that is in front of the church at Krakowskie Przedmieście. It is impossible to understand the history of Poland from Stanislaus in Skalka to Maximilian Kolbe at Oświęcim unless we apply to them that same single fundamental criterion that is called Jesus Christ.

Today, here in Victory Square, in the capital of Poland, I am asking with all of you, through the great Eucharistic prayer, that Christ will not cease to be for us an open book of life for the future, for our Polish future.

Having lived through the oppression of Nazism and Communism himself, John Paul II acknowledges the hardships his country has gone through. In the final excerpt of the homily, he underscores that if Poland is not free, justice in all of Europe is impossible. He further commemorates the sacrifice and bravery of the Poles throughout history who fought for their nation, whether that was a soldier fighting on the battlefield, a professor contributing his intellectual abilities, or the physical labor of a farmer producing food for the population. John Paul II recognizes that Poland required the collective sacrifice and labor of Polish society to prosper during these difficult times in history and honors each person with the talents/sacrifices he was able to provide. Each person and every sector of society has an individual story that adds to Poland's overall identity.

We are before the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. In the ancient and contemporary history of Poland this tomb has a special basis, a special reason for its existence. In how many places in our native land has that soldier fallen! In how many places in Europe and the world has he cried with his death that there can be no just Europe without the independence of Poland marked on its map!

The history of the motherland written through the tomb of an Unknown Soldier!

I wish to kneel before this tomb to venerate every seed that falls into the earth and dies and thus bears fruit. It may be the seed of the blood of a soldier shed on the battlefield, or the sacrifice of martyrdom in concentration camps or in prisons. It may be the seed of hard daily toil, with the sweat of one's brow, in the fields, the workshop, the mine, the foundries and the factories. It may be the seed of the love of parents who do not refuse to give life to a new human being and undertake the whole of the task of bringing him up. It may be the seed of creative work in the universities, the higher institutes, the libraries and the places where the national culture is built. It may be the seed of prayer, of service of the sick, the suffering, the abandoned—"all that of which Poland is made".

All that—the history of the motherland shaped for a thousand years by the succession of the generations (among them the present generation and the coming generation) and by each son and daughter of the motherland, even if they are anonymous and unknown like the Soldier before whose tomb we are now.



Lastly, the most famous, final lines from his homily:

And I cry—I who am a Son of the land of Poland and who am also Pope John Paul II—I cry from all the depths of this Millennium, I cry on the vigil of Pentecost:

Let your Spirit descend.  
Let your Spirit descend.  
and renew the face of the earth,  
the face of this land.<sup>267</sup>

These final words ignited the crowd to go into an applause that lasted for fourteen minutes. This lengthy applause was a simple way that the Poles could release the repression they felt over the past forty years. Messages of faith and any mention of Christ were simply not allowed to be discussed in public. John Paul II did not stop the crowd from their applause, instead, he recognized the crowd needed this moment of liberation. Furthermore, through observing the crowd, one could notice other subtle signs of how they demonstrated the liberation of their oppressed spiritual nature. For example, throughout his homily, the crowd would sing an “ancient Christian Latin hymn” with the words: “Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat.”<sup>268</sup> This translates into English as “Christ wins, Christ reigns, Christ commands.” More simply put, and more widely understood, it is translated into “We Want God.”

In addition, there were various banners and signs with creative slogans visible in the crowd that revealed the true feelings of the people present. One banner had the Communist Party slogan written on it “The Party is for the People” with a creative addition, “But the People are for the Pope.” There was another one that stated, “35 years of the People’s Republic of Poland – 1,000 years of Christianity in Poland.” Evidently, human spirituality ultimately could not be eliminated even in a society that actively tried to abolish faith.

The final, famous quote of “*Let your Spirit descend*” inspired Poles to live for themselves and not under the fear of the communist regime. It was also a cry out to God to ask for His help to free Poland and other nations behind the Iron Curtain from the shackles of atheistic communism. Although each listener could interpret his homily differently, John Paul II’s main message was clear: freedom is possible, do not fear the communist regime, and begin to live life for yourselves. According to George Weigel, the common thread that can be found throughout the homilies of the 1979 pilgrimage and beyond is, “You are not who they say you are. Let me remind you who you are.”<sup>269</sup> Essentially, John Paul wanted to remind that each person has an identity in Christ and a purpose designed by God. You are not just a means of production in an endless class struggle; your worth and value go beyond that.

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<sup>267</sup> John Paul II, “Homily of His Holiness,” The Holy See, June 1, 1979, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19790602\\_polonia-varsavia.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790602_polonia-varsavia.html).

<sup>268</sup> ““We Want God! ..... We Want Hope!”” Catholic Voice, July 29, 2020, <https://www.catholicvoice.org.au/we-want-god-we-want-hope/>.

<sup>269</sup> Carl Anderson, “Liberating a Continent: John Paul II and the Fall of Communism,” video, 1:33:22, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7dHzSFIR\\_o&t=1503s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7dHzSFIR_o&t=1503s).

## Recognizing Polish History, Tradition, and Culture

John Paul II emphasized in his first homily and those following that Christ was essential to the history of Poland and to the life of each Pole. Yet his homilies and speeches were not intended for only a Catholic audience. John Paul II also appealed to non-Catholics and dissidents by focusing on the Polish identity, the history and culture of Poland, and the sacrifices each Pole made. In a Marxist world, countries with rich histories, cultures, and traditions were meant to be erased so that a new society could emerge. Hearing a prominent, public voice that reminded Poles of their history and Polish identity was unheard of for decades. Throughout the 1979 pilgrimage, John Paul II refers to the following significant parts of Polish history and culture.

At the holy mass for university students on June 3<sup>rd</sup> in Warsaw, he recognized the impact the historical Jagiellonian University and Polish universities in general have had on generations of Polish scholars and intellectuals:

The university students of Warsaw and those of the other seats of learning in this central metropolitan region are the heirs of specific traditions going back through the generations to the medieval "scholars" connected principally with the Jagellonian University, the oldest university in Poland... They bring together hundreds of thousands of students who are being trained in various branches of knowledge and are preparing for intellectual professions and particularly important tasks in the life of the nation... I see in you, in a certain sense, my younger colleagues, because I too owe to the Polish university the basis of my intellectual formation.<sup>270</sup>

During the homily at the Cathedral of Gniezno on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, John Paul II made mention of the Piast dynasty, the first recorded dynasty to rule Poland. In the homily, he recognizes the Piast dynasty as the birth of Poland and aspires to remind Poles that they are products of history and culture. The new Soviet Man/Woman was meant to disregard the past as something that didn't exist anymore. John Paul II comes in to remind his people not to forget their roots nor where they came from. Ultimately, Polish identity and statehood were rooted in Christianity, which began with the emerging Piast dynasty.

The castles with which the beginning of the faith in the land of our Polish forefathers is linked are, in fact, that of Poznań—which from the earliest times, beginning two years after the baptism of Mieszko, was the residence of the Bishop—and that of Gniezno—where the great ecclesiastical and state act of the year 1000 took place: the meeting before the relics of Saint Wojciech of the envoys of Pope Sylvester II of Rome with the Roman Emperor Otto III and the first Polish king (then only a prince as yet) Bolesław Chrobry (Boleslaus the Bold), the son and successor of Mieszko, in which the first Polish ecclesiastical province was set up, thus laying the foundations of the hierarchical order for the whole of the history of Poland. Within this ecclesiastical province of Gniezno we find in the year 1000 the episcopal sees of Kraków, Wrocław and Kołobrzeg, linked in a single ecclesiastical organization.

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<sup>270</sup> John Paul II, "Holy Mass for University Students," The Holy See, June 2, 1979, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19790603\\_polonia-varsavia-universitari.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790603_polonia-varsavia-universitari.html).

Pope John Paul II, a Slav, a son of the Polish nation, feels how deeply fixed in the ground of history are the roots of his origin, how many centuries stand behind the word of the Holy Spirit proclaimed by him from Saint Peter's Vatican Hill, and here at Gniezno, from the hill of Lech, and at Kraków, from the heights of Wawel.<sup>271</sup>

On June 3<sup>rd</sup> John Paul II addressed the young people of Gniezno on the topic of Polish culture. As Poland has thousands of years of history, this heritage affects the next generation's culture and national identity. Poland lost its independence but regained freedom because of its firm roots in religion and cultural identity.

Culture is above all a common good of the nation. Polish culture is a good on which the spiritual life of Poles rests. It distinguishes us as a nation. It is decisive for us throughout the course of history, more decisive even than material power. Indeed, it is more decisive than political boundaries. The Polish nation, as is well known, passed through the hard trial of the loss of its independence for over a hundred years. And in the midst of this trial it preserved its own identity. It remained spiritually independent because it had its own culture. Indeed, in the period of the partitions it still greatly enriched its culture and made it deeper, since it is only by creating culture that it can keep itself in being.

You are hearing these words from a man who owes his own spiritual formation from the beginning to Polish culture, to its literature, its music, its plastic arts, its theatre—to Polish history, to the Polish Christian traditions, to the Polish schools, the Polish universities.<sup>272</sup>

In an address at the 169<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly to the Polish Episcopal Conference, John Paul II proclaims the significant role of the Church in helping Polish society to help maintain its own identity, especially during the times in history when Poland's sovereignty was questioned. The Church was a place where people could come to pray and worship, and also served as a refuge center for people to express themselves freely.

When national and state structures were lacking, society, for the most part Catholic, found support in the hierarchical order of the Church. And this helped society to overcome the times of the partition of the country and the times of occupation; it helped society to maintain, and even to deepen its understanding of, the awareness of, its own identity. Perhaps certain people from other countries may consider this situation "untypical," but for Poles it has an unmistakable eloquence. It is simply a part of the truth of the history of our own motherland.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> John Paul II, "Homily of His Holiness -- Cathedral of Gniezno," The Holy See, June 2, 1979, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19790603\\_polonia-gniezno-cattedrale.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790603_polonia-gniezno-cattedrale.html).

<sup>272</sup> John Paul II, "Address of His Holiness John Paul II to the Young People of Gniezno," The Holy See, June 3, 1979, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/june/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19790603\\_polonia-gniezno-giovani.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19790603_polonia-gniezno-giovani.html).

<sup>273</sup> John Paul II, "Address of His Holiness John Paul II at the 169th Plenary Assembly to the Polish Episcopal Conference," The Holy See, June 5, 1979, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/june/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19790605\\_polonia-jasna-gora-episcopato.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19790605_polonia-jasna-gora-episcopato.html).

John Paul II starts his homily in Częstochowa, Jasna Góra on June 4<sup>th</sup> with a quotation from a famous Polish poet, Adam Mickiewicz, to introduce the importance of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa. The Blessed Mother in Częstochowa has become “the most powerful symbol of ‘Polishness.’”<sup>274</sup> She is a symbol of Polish identity, history, resistance, protection, strength, and hope. Poles from all over the country continue to visit the Queen and Mother of Poland to reverence her and ask for personal graces as well as national protection. During the communist era, she became so frequently visited that she was even recognized “as the center of anti-government resistance.”<sup>275</sup> In addition, the Black Madonna image was present in virtually every church in Poland during the communist era. As the Church during this time was not only for Catholics, but also for members of the opposition who didn’t necessarily believe in God, people came to respect her as a symbol of Polish history, identity, and resistance. John Paul II reminds his audience that in order to understand Poland and her history, it is best to come to know it through the Mother and Queen of Poland.

Holy Virgin guarding bright Czestochowa...

To my mind come back these words of the poet Mickiewicz, who in an invocation to the Virgin at the beginning of his "Pan Tadeusz" expressed what then beat and still beats in the hearts of all Poles, by making use of the language of faith and that of our national tradition. [...] The image of Jasna Gora expresses a tradition and a language of faith still more ancient than our history and also reflecting the whole of the content of the Bogurodzica, on which we meditated yesterday at Gniezno, recalling the mission of Saint Wojciech (Adalbert) and going back to the first moments of the proclamation of the Gospel in the land of Poland.

The Poles are accustomed to link with this place, this shrine, the many happenings of their lives: the various joyful or sad moments, especially the solemn, decisive moments, the occasions of responsibility, such as the choice of the direction for one's life, the choice of one's vocation, the birth of one's children, the final school examinations, and so many other occasions. They are accustomed to come with their problems to Jasna Gora to speak of them with their heavenly Mother, who not only has her image here, one of the best known and most venerated pictures of her in the world, but is specially present here.

Jasna Gora has shown itself an inward bond in Polish life, a force that touches the depths of our hearts and holds the entire nation in the humble yet strong attitude of fidelity to God, to the Church and to her Hierarchy.

Jasna Gora is, in fact, not only a place of pilgrimage for the Poles of the motherland and of the whole world but also the nation's shrine. One must listen in this holy place in order to hear the beating of the heart of the nation in the heart of the Mother. For her heart beats, we know, together with all the appointments of history, with all the happenings in our national life: how many times, in fact, has it vibrated with the laments of the historical sufferings of

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<sup>274</sup> Anna Hamling, “The Power of an Image: The Black Madonna of Częstochowa,” THINK.IAFOR.ORG, March 30, 2017, <https://think.iafor.org/the-power-of-an-image-the-black-madonna-of-czestochowa/>.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

Poland, but also with the shouts of joy and victory! The history of Poland can be written in different ways; especially in the case of the history of the last centuries, it can be interpreted along different lines. But if we want to know how this history is interpreted by the heart of the Poles, we must come here, we must listen to this shrine, we must hear the echo of the life of the whole nation in the heart of its Mother and Queen.<sup>276</sup>

Upon John Paul II's arrival in Kraków on June 6<sup>th</sup>, the pope recalls his personal memories of his beloved city at the welcoming ceremony. He also makes mention of the historical and cultural significance that Kraków, Poland's former capital, holds for the country.

Kraków, from the tenderest years of my life, has been for me a particular synthesis of all that it means to be Polish and Christian. She has always spoken of the great historic past of my Motherland. She always represented for me in a sublime way the spirit of my country. Today, I greet my beloved Kraków as a pilgrim.

I greet all that which constitutes it: the witness of history, the tradition of the kings, the cultural and scientific patrimony and, at the same time, the modern metropolis.<sup>277</sup>

Later that day, John Paul II made a visit to the Wawel Cathedral to commemorate and pray for notable figures in Polish history. He states:

After arriving in Kraków, I have directed my first steps to the Cathedral, in order to meet you who were waiting here at the tomb of Saint Stanislaus, of the blessed Queen Hedwig, and of our kings, of our military commanders, and of our inspired national poets. You all know very well what this Wawel cathedral has been and is for me.<sup>278</sup>

During his prayer in Wawel Castle, he made a special recognition to Blessed Queen Hedwig, better known as Queen Jadwiga. She is a prominent figure in Polish history who died at the young age of 25 but nevertheless made a great impact on Poland as the first female monarch. A lot of her time was spent in charity work aiding hospitals, schools, and churches. Queen Jadwiga was also remembered for her efforts to strengthen and spread Christianity by providing a scholarship for Lithuanian students in order "to study at Charles University in Prague...and she also founded a bishopric in Vilnius."<sup>279</sup> One of her most significant achievements was restoring the Kraków Academy, known today as Jagiellonian University, which was renamed in her and her husband's honor. In addition, Queen Jadwiga was the reason a department of theology opened at the Academy. As John Paul II was once a student at Jagiellonian and had a strong

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<sup>276</sup> John Paul II, "Act of Consecration to Our Lady of Jasna Gora," The Holy See, June 3, 1979, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19790604\\_polonia-jasna-gora.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790604_polonia-jasna-gora.html).

<sup>277</sup> John Paul II, "Welcoming Ceremony in Kraków," The Holy See, June 6, 1979, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/june/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19790606\\_polonia-cracovia-arrivo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19790606_polonia-cracovia-arrivo.html).

<sup>278</sup> John Paul II, "Meeting with the Faithful Gathered in Wawel Cathedral at the Tomb of Saint Stanislaus," The Holy See, June 6, 1979, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/june/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19790606\\_polonia-cracovia-cattedrale.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19790606_polonia-cracovia-cattedrale.html)

<sup>279</sup> "Jul 18 - St Hedwig (1374-1399) Polish Queen," Catholicireland.net, July 18, 2012, <https://www.catholicireland.net/saintoftheday/st-hedwig-1374-1399-polish-queen/>.

connection to the University, he made it so that Queen Jadwiga is cherished in Kraków as the founder of academia. John Paul II would later go on to canonize her in 1997.

Now, as then, I pray every day for my beloved Archdiocese:  
for the families;  
for the parishes and deaneries;  
for the Religious Congregations of men and women;  
'for the Krakow Seminary and all the Seminaries situated in the City;  
for the Theological Athenaeum, heir to the most ancient Faculty in Poland, belonging to the Jagiellonian University, which we owe to the Blessed Queen Hedwig.<sup>280</sup>

Towards the end of his pilgrimage on June 7<sup>th</sup>, John Paul II visited the horrific site of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp. In fact, the communists were keen on having him visit Auschwitz so they could prove that the problem of 20th-century totalitarianism was not Soviet Communism, but rather Nazism. John Paul II recognized that this camp is where the absolute disregard and dismantling of human dignity began to take place. During the mass, he commemorated all the people and nationalities that died, with special recognition to his Jewish brothers and sisters who “were intended for total extermination.”<sup>281</sup> He also made special mention of the six million Poles who lost their lives during World War II, one recognizable case being that of Father Maximilian Kolbe. Kolbe was a Polish priest who volunteered his life in exchange to save the life of a layman, Franciszek Gajowniczek, who had a family. Kolbe’s honorable sacrifice is proclaimed by John Paul II during the homily:

This victory through faith and love was won in this place by a man whose first name is Maximilian Mary. Surname: Kolbe. Profession (as registered in the books of the concentration camp): Catholic priest. Vocation: a son of Saint Francis. Birth: a son of simple, hardworking devout parents, who were weavers near Łódź. By God's grace and the Church's judgment: Blessed.

The victory through faith and love was won by him in this place, which was built for the negation of faith — faith in God and faith in man — and to trample radically not only on love but on all signs of human dignity, of humanity. A place built on hatred and on contempt for man in the name of a crazed ideology. A place built on cruelty. On the entrance gate which still exists, is placed the inscription *Arbeit macht frei*, which has a sardonic sound, since its meaning was radically contradicted by what took place within.

In this site of the terrible slaughter that brought death to four million people of different nations, Father Maximilian voluntarily offered himself for death in the starvation bunker for a brother, and so won a spiritual victory like that of Christ himself. This brother still lives

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<sup>280</sup> John Paul II, “To the Faithful Gathered in Wawel Cathedral,” The Holy See, June 6, 1979, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/june/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19790606\\_polonia-cracovia-cattedrale.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19790606_polonia-cracovia-cattedrale.html).

<sup>281</sup> John Paul II, “Holy Mass at the Concentration Camp,” The Holy See, June 7, 1979, sec. 2 [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19790607\\_polonia-brzezinka.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790607_polonia-brzezinka.html).

today in the land of Poland.

But was Father Maximilian Kolbe the only one? Certainly he won a victory that was immediately felt by his companions in captivity and is still felt today by the Church and the world. However, there is no doubt that many other similar victories were won.<sup>282</sup>

On June 8<sup>th</sup> in Nowy Targ, a city close to the Tatra Mountains, the pope made special mention of the landscape and beauty of the Polish land. This mountain town and nearby land also possessed its challenges; the rocky land was not very fertile and became a main reason for emigration in the region. Accordingly, John Paul II uses this example of emigration to remind all Poles who had to leave their country for material gain not to forget their beloved Polish heritage.

Here, in this place at Nowy Targ, I wish to speak of the Polish land, because here it shows itself particularly beautiful and rich in landscapes. Man needs the beauty of nature, and so it is not surprising that people come here from various parts of Poland and from abroad. They come both in summer and in winter. They seek rest. They want to find themselves again through contact with nature. They want to rebuild their energies through the wholesome physical exercise of walking, climbing and skiing. This hospitable region is also a land of great pastoral work, because people come here to regain not only their physical strength but their spiritual strength too.

This beautiful land is at the same time a difficult land. Rocky, mountainous. Not as fertile as the plain of the Vistula. And so permit me, precisely from this land of the lower Carpathians and the lower Tatra, to make reference to something that has always been very dear to the heart of the Poles: a love for the land and work in the fields. No one can deny that this represents not only a feeling, an affective bond, but also a great social and economic problem. These parts are especially well acquainted with the problem, because it was precisely from these places, where there was the greatest lack of cultivable soil and sometimes great poverty, that people emigrated far way, beyond Poland, beyond the seas. There they sought work and bread, and they found it. Today I wish to say to all those people scattered throughout the world, wherever they may be: "*Szczęść Boże*"—May God assist you! Let them not forget their country of origin, family, Church, prayer and everything they took from here. Because even though they had to emigrate for lack of material goods, yet they took with them from here a great spiritual heritage. Let them take care that while they become rich materially they do not become spiritually impoverished: neither they, not their children, nor their grandchildren.<sup>283</sup>

Later that day, John Paul II gave a speech to the university students of Kraków. He instilled in them lessons of responsibility and reminded them of the importance of building a relationship with Christ. He ends his speech proclaiming to the youth that they are the future of the world and the Church.

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid., sec. 1.

<sup>283</sup> John Paul II, "Homily of His Holiness: Mass in Nowy Targ," The Holy See, June 7, 1979, sec. 2-3, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19790608\\_polonia-nowy-targ.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790608_polonia-nowy-targ.html).

You must carry into the future the whole of the experience of history that is called "Poland." It is a difficult experience, perhaps one of the most difficult in the world, in Europe, and in the Church. Do not be afraid of the toil; be afraid only of thoughtlessness and pusillanimity. From the difficult experience that we call "Poland" a better future can be drawn, but only on condition that you are honourable, temperate, believing, free in spirit and strong in your convictions.<sup>284</sup>

Although various other examples of “Polishness” could be highlighted in John Paul’s public speeches and homilies during his 1979 pilgrimage, the preceding aim to highlight key excerpts. By reminding Poles of their history and culture, John Paul II could give Poles from all walks of life the hope they needed to move forward and see life through a different lens. Perseverance was in fact a key characteristic seen in Polish history time and time again. Furthermore, John Paul II wanted Poles to believe that their spirit of freedom was stronger than their oppressive reality. Embracing Polish identity, tradition, history, and culture in a society that aimed to eradicate these elements was one significant way to do so. George Weigel summarizes it best by stating that one main message of John Paul II’s 1979 pilgrimage was to remind the Poles, “You’re a people formed by a culture at the heart of which is the Catholic faith. If you own that again, if you take back the truth of your identity, you’ll find tools of resistance that totalitarianism cannot match.”<sup>285</sup>

The preceding quotes from his various homilies during the 1979 pilgrimage show how John Paul II was very cautious not to antagonize the communists with his words and didn’t directly center his message around the fight against communism or the freedom of democracy. Rather, his overall message was to give hope to people from a Christian and historical perspective. And in fact, this proved to be enough. He didn’t need to send out an aggressive, direct message against the regime. It was known that the Catholic Church and religion itself were the enemies of the state. Having a powerful Christian Polish figure, let alone a powerful world figure, be on the side of the people and preach the Gospel in an atheist-controlled society was enough to let the Poles know that there was, in fact, hope for a better future.

Any gain for the Church was a loss for the communists, because those who belonged to the Church could not fully accept and practice the communist ideology. It was during this pilgrimage that the communists realized the strength the Church had against their regime. It also became increasingly obvious that the true leader of Poland was not the Communist Party, but rather, the man who had captured the hearts and minds of Poles, John Paul II. The pilgrimage ultimately showed that even if the regime could control every aspect of society, they could not take away one’s faith. The immense love the people of Poland displayed for John Paul II during his visit proved that.

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<sup>284</sup> John Paul II, “Meeting with the University Students of Kraków,” *The Holy See*, June 8, 1979, sec. 4, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/june/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19790608\\_polonia-cracovia-universitari.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19790608_polonia-cracovia-universitari.html).

<sup>285</sup> Carl Anderson, “Liberating a Continent: John Paul II and the Fall of Communism,” video, 1:33:22, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7dHzSFIR\\_o&t=1503s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7dHzSFIR_o&t=1503s).



## The Lessons Learned From the 1979 Pilgrimage

Overall, the 1979 pilgrimage started what was known as the “Revolution of Conscience” among Poles, because it brought light to four critical notions.<sup>286</sup> First, the Polish people realized they had a strong religious and political Polish leader, moreover a world figure, who was on the side of the people. Second, they began to see the power in numbers during John Paul II’s visit and just how many of their fellow countrymen also gave up in believing the façade of the communist state. Anne Applebaum states that until John Paul II’s visit, Poles did not realize “that there were so many people who felt the same way.”<sup>287</sup> The 1979 pilgrimage was the first movement in decades that gave Poles a feeling that they were part of a community. In communism, the best way to control the population is through isolation and fear. Now an opportunity presented itself where people could unite, both Catholics and dissidents. Third, his visit started the beginning of an open dialogue on topics such as faith, religion, and history. People were often hesitant to speak freely about these ideas, as the rule for the past 35 years had been to accept no other point of view than that of Marxism. There was a fear one could lose one’s job or become imprisoned for speaking out against the regime. The pope presented an opportunity for people to start debating, drawing their own conclusions, and speaking more freely again. Lastly, his pilgrimage reinforced the power of the Catholic Church. Even after 34 years of atheist rule, the communist ideology did not manage to replace God. Faith and a desire to worship were stronger than ever before. The communists could not fight the strength of the Cross.

What makes this June pilgrimage so memorable was its peaceful and orderly nature. At any moment the crowds of thousands could have turned violent and chaotic due to the built-up resentment among the Poles against their oppressors.<sup>288</sup> Instead, the people took it upon themselves not to give in to this aggression, but rather to embody the pope’s message of overcoming evil with good. The audience at every destination was well behaved and disciplined, and there was an overall “tremendous sense of order.”<sup>289</sup> As said best by George Weigel, “It’s the kind of order that comes out of an intuitive feeling among people of solidarity. We’re in this together. We each have a responsibility to each other to behave in a mature and serious way.”<sup>290</sup> This kind of peaceful social revolution could not have been brought on by any other figure except the pope. It was his character, his nature, and his overall message of peace that inspired people to behave in such a mannerly way. In effect, during the days in the summer of 1979, John Paul II fostered the feeling of the Solidarity Movement among the Poles even before its official creation, 14 months after the visit.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> George Weigel, *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3.

<sup>287</sup> Paul Kengor and Robert Orlando, *The Divine Plan* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2019), 98.

<sup>288</sup> “Nine Days That Changed the World,” video, 1:34:43, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W5EiTKciWYo>.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

Although at the time Poles did not know the Solidarity movement would be the result of the 1979 pilgrimage, they expected something worthwhile to come out of the pope's visit. The visit created an atmosphere of unity among the Poles, and the feeling that as a nation, we Poles are freer, stronger, and more hopeful than ever before. John Paul II's message gave the Polish people hope that this time in their history would only be momentary. He inspired both Catholics and non-Catholics alike not to live in fear of the communists and to have the courage to voice their opinions. The famous words he spoke on the night of October 22, 1978, during the inauguration ceremony of his pontificate, "Do not be afraid," became the theme not only in his papacy, but also of his 1979 visit to Poland. He continues, "Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of States, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development. Do not be afraid. Christ knows 'what is in man.' He alone knows it."<sup>292</sup> This quote was in direct opposition to the way the communist world functioned. Ultimately, his words inspired Poles and all those living behind the Iron Curtain to be themselves, to think freely, to worship and pray as they wished, and most of all, to be not afraid when doing so. The communists could only control through fear, and Pope John Paul II was able to finally remove that barrier of fear that so many felt.

## **The Roots and Beginnings of the Solidarity Movement**

This newfound hope and inspiration that the Poles found during the visit of John Paul II would lead to the creation of the Solidarity Movement the following year in 1980. As stated by George Weigel, "out of that solidarity came Solidarity."<sup>293</sup> There had been many attempts before 1980 to start a similar movement on a scale as large as the Solidarity movement would become, but they all eventually failed. Lech Wałęsa, a common man who is recognized as the main leader of the Solidarity Movement, stated himself, "I have no doubt that without the pope's words, without his presence, the birth of Solidarity would not have been possible."<sup>294</sup> People now had the courage to act on their internal feelings in public, as Wałęsa also stated, "and the twenty who followed me were suddenly ten million. It was a greater multiplication than the loaves and the fishes."<sup>295</sup> A people once afraid to speak their minds had now "regained the private ownership of their tongues."<sup>296</sup>

Lech Wałęsa was a former shipyard worker and electrician at the Gdańsk Lenin Shipyard. His ability to relate to the people and be in the same position as other workers was what initially gave the movement great accessibility; however, Solidarity's roots were already beginning before the leadership and action of Wałęsa. The movement arose from a long history of discontent among Polish workers who could no longer tolerate the declining economic and social conditions

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<sup>292</sup> John Paul II, "Homily of His Holiness John Paul II for the Inauguration of His Pontificate," The Holy See, October 21, 1978, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1978/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19781022\\_inizio-pontificato.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1978/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19781022_inizio-pontificato.html).

<sup>293</sup> "Nine Days That Changed the World."

<sup>294</sup> Stephanie Slade, "The Pope Who Helped Bring Down Communism," Reason -- Free Minds and Free Markets, November 26, 2021, <https://reason.com/2021/11/20/the-pope-who-helped-bring-down-communism/#:~:text=As%20the%20labor%20organizer%20and,would%20not%20have%20been%20possible.%22>.

<sup>295</sup> Kengor and Orlando, *The Divine Plan*, 111.

<sup>296</sup> Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 324.

in their country. Before the Solidarity Movement had officially emerged, mass protests and strikes were already occurring in Poland on average every ten years (1956, 1968, 1970, 1976, and 1980). Tensions between society and the communist state were only exacerbating each year. Moscow had exercised complete control over Poland ever since 1945, and Poland in reality only existed as a puppet state.

Every sector of society, with the exception of the Catholic Church, was dominated by Soviet influence. Accordingly, the Soviets simply liquidated all institutions they could not exert their power over. The Church was the only institution that the Soviets could not completely control, and which was able to keep its independence. As a result, it became a place of refuge for Catholics and non-Catholics, a place where Poles came to voice their opinions and true political feelings. The identity the Church provided for Poles and its strong position at the time was one of the key contributors to the start of the Solidarity Movement. However, the Church was not the only place where like-minded individuals could meet to discuss ideas. Anti-communist opposition groups such as KOR (Komitet Obrony Robotników, or Workers' Defense Committee) and, later, Free Trade Unions of the Coast, also became prevalent and were necessary for the start of the Solidarity Movement. These groups fought the regime by publishing and distributing underground newsletters such as *Robotnik Wybrzeża* (Coastal Worker), holding discussions and independent lectures, creating a legal office that would be responsible for any abuses in power against the workers, and many other objectives of this nature. Solidarity leaders such as Lech Wałęsa, Anna Walentynowicz, and Andrzej Gwiazda were unsurprisingly a part of these worker communities.

Although the Church and the opposition groups in society were key in beginning the Solidarity movement, the breaking point that ignited the start of the Solidarity Movement was the economic crisis resulting from the failure of the state-centralized economy. One author writes, "From the mid-1970s, the Polish economy had slipped more deeply into an irreversible economic decline as production levels plummeted, real wages stagnated, shortages increased, and foreign debt mounted, reaching \$18 billion by 1980."<sup>297</sup> Constant shortages of necessities (food, water, electricity), long waiting queues, and worker discontent became the new normal. The system of the People's Republic of Poland (PRL) did not have the benefit of everyday workers or farmers in mind, rather, the system was designed to favor the party activists who controlled all companies and institutions in the country. After years of the same tiring conditions, the common workers were beginning to lose hope that conditions in Poland would ever change for the better.

The people's patience was finally broken in July of 1980 when the Polish Communist Party dramatically increased the price of food products by 60% and popular meat cuts by 69%.<sup>298</sup> This inflation, combined with constant shortages, decreasing living standards, and unfair access to food, where communists and their families were assured to receive the best products and meat available at the expense of others, was too much to handle. Poles were not going to be victims in

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<sup>297</sup> Kelly Hignett, "The Evolution of the Polish Solidarity Movement," The View East, February 6, 2009, <https://thevieweast.wordpress.com/tag/solidarity/>.

<sup>298</sup> Brian Crozier, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire*, (Roseville: Prima, 2000).

their own country and began to organize sets of individual strikes throughout the country. On August 14<sup>th</sup>, the workers at the Gdańsk Lenin shipyard joined and staged an illegal strike that began to attract workers from all over the Tri-city area (Gdańsk, Gdynia, Sopot). The regime attempted to control news that a strike had broken out in Gdańsk “by instituting a news blackout and cutting off the telephone lines connecting Gdańsk to the rest of the country.”<sup>299</sup> However, due to the power of Radio Free Europe, the news of the strikes was still able to spread throughout Poland and ultimately, to the whole world. The Soviets could not control the breakout of strikes that began to appear throughout the nation.

In order to calm the masses, the director of the shipyard, Klemens Gniech, agreed to raise the pay of the Lenin shipyard workers by 1,500 *złoty*. The workers also imposed four other main demands, which included “the return of Anna Walentynowicz and Lech Wałęsa to their jobs at the shipyard; family allowances similar to those allotted to the police; an assurance that there would be no reprisals against the strikers; and a permanent monument to those killed in December 1970.”<sup>300</sup> A couple of days later, the workers came to a consensus that this deal was sufficient and decided to go forward with signing the agreement laid out by Gniech and the communists with the included demands. The strike was officially called off, but when the news reached the delegates from the other workplaces, they became outraged by the fact that the shipyard workers agreed to stop the protests with only the pay of their own wages in mind.<sup>301</sup> Two courageous Polish women, Anna Walentynowicz and Alina Pienkowska, advocated that this strike should not be stopped for pay raises, and that Poles should continue to fight until there were fair conditions and just wages throughout the entire country.<sup>302</sup> It should also be noted that Anna Walentynowicz was a fierce crane operator and welder who had been fired from the shipyard about a week prior to the strike, five months before her planned retirement. The workers knew of her dismissal from the shipyard, and her firing also was a main trigger for the August 14<sup>th</sup> protest.

Once a consensus was reached to renew the strikes, the Interfactory Strike Committee (MKS, or Międzyszkładowy Komitet Strajkowy) was formed, which in time would evolve into the Solidarity Union. MKS was headed by Lech Wałęsa and represented over 600 workplaces across Poland.<sup>303</sup> Within the MKS, the famous list of the “21 Demands,” inscribed on large, wooden plaques, was created and proudly displayed on Gate Number Two of the Lenin shipyard. These demands covered a wide range of issues, political, economic, and social. The first demand was the most urgent, as it called for the legal creation of free trade unions and the acceptance of unions independent of the Communist Party. The second demand guaranteed the right to strike, as well as the security of the strikers--essential so the workers could continue their actions

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<sup>299</sup> Tim Weiner, *The Folly and The Glory: America, Russia, and Political Warfare 1945-2020*, (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2020), 109.

<sup>300</sup> Seth G Jones, *A Covert Action, Reagan, the CIA, and the Cold War Struggle in Poland* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2018), 94.

<sup>301</sup> Pon UJ, *Solidarność. Największy Ruch Społeczny w Dziejach Świata*, video, 27:12, 2014, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g\\_2x47GS-V4&t=256s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_2x47GS-V4&t=256s).

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

without fear. The third demand concerned the guarantee of freedom of speech. This included freedom of all press and publications, less government censorship, and for the mass media to represent all faiths and be available to all people.<sup>304</sup> The fourth demand concentrated on restoring the former rights of citizens who were persecuted. This group included those who were dismissed from their jobs after the previous strikes of 1970 and 1976, any students expelled from universities for their political views, and political prisoners.<sup>305</sup>

The next 17 demands focused largely on social issues, such as paid 3-year maternity leave, old-age pensions, food coupons for meat products, increase of pay by 2,000 *złoty* each month, paid compensation of all workers during the period of the strike, and other demands pertaining to fair treatment.<sup>306</sup> These demands reflected the interests of Poles throughout the entire country, so it is no surprise that the protests of August 1980 became as massive as they did. Due to this, the Communist Party had no option but to negotiate with the people. Eventually, a set of agreements were signed between the regime and the strikers under the condition that there would be no reprisals. Among the agreements signed, the most notable was the Gdańsk Agreement, which granted all 21 demands of the workers. On August 31<sup>st</sup>, Lech Wałęsa proudly signed the documents with his famous oversized pen decorated that contained the image of John Paul II. With the right to unionize now legal, 36 trade unions representing around 3 million workers united on September 17<sup>th</sup> to officially establish *Solidarność*.

#### **469 Days of Solidarity Before Martial Law**

Solidarity started as a free trade union, but transformed into a massive social movement to which 10 million Poles, or 80 percent of the total workforce belonged (including even Communist Party members). This massive number indicates that every third Polish person in the country was a member of the Solidarity organization.<sup>307</sup> To this day, it is known as the largest trade and social movement there ever was, and, at the time, it was the first union among the Warsaw Pact countries which was not State-controlled. Solidarity provided a newfound hope in a society that had been manipulated and intimidated for decades. This movement was able to offer the Poles an alternative to the communist regime and a new sense that society was headed in the right direction. The union not only represented the betterment of workers' rights and improved economic conditions, but it also became a larger symbol of freedom and democracy. Ewa Kulik, one of Solidarity's leaders, shares the following about the Solidarity Movement: "Even though you had the feeling that the whole system was trying to enslave you, you felt free internally. You were free in an unfree country. And this internal freedom gave us joy."<sup>308</sup>

New opportunities started arising that were not prominent before, such as the organization of festivals and concerts, the creation of new magazines, publications of literature,

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<sup>304</sup> "21 Demands of MKS," Wikipedia, December 15, 2022, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/21\\_demands\\_of\\_MKS](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/21_demands_of_MKS).

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> *Solidarność. Największy Ruch Społeczny w Dziejach Świata*, video.

<sup>308</sup> John Feffer, "Solidarity Underground," HuffPost, April 7, 2015, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/solidarity-underground\\_b\\_7019818](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/solidarity-underground_b_7019818).

and the creation of poetry. One member of the Solidarity Movement writes the following about how this period in history made him feel:

For the first time I had a taste of being a citizen  
For someone who had lived under communism, it was like a narcotic or a taste of fresh air, it was like having your identity for the first time.<sup>309</sup>

The communists did not like knowing that people were publishing that they were "breathing again with the entirety of one's lungs" and that "the sun has shown itself from behind the clouds for the first time in years."<sup>310</sup> As a result, the regime responded by restricting who could have access to Solidarity's publications. They did this by limiting the amount of paper that publications could use, and began censoring the information conveyed in the publications. It should be noted that there were only two magazines at the time that had governmental approval to be public. One was known as *Jedność* (Unity) and the other was the famous publication known as *Tygodnik Solidarność* (the Solidarity Weekly). The majority of other publications and media coming from Solidarity were still published illegally or semi-legally.

The regime's control of Solidarity didn't stop with censoring the freedom of speech. They made sure registration into the union was a difficult process; they completely opposed the creation of similar farmer trade unions (Rural Solidarity); they rejected any propositions to improve the economy; and there were even several cases of brutal beatings of Solidarity activists.<sup>311</sup> Even with these imposed limitations during the beginning stages of the Solidarity Movement, the freedom granted to Solidarity was still too much. The Kremlin was not happy with Solidarity's success and began growing impatient with the lack of action from the Polish regime. For the Soviets, Solidarity represented an increasing opposition and inability to control society.

Although *Solidarność* membership officially totaled 10 million, the movement in reality encompassed those 10 million workers' families as well, which meant Solidarity "represented the vast majority of the population" in Poland--a population that at the time totaled 36 million.<sup>312</sup> As a result of this movement's rising influence, the freedoms that the Poles only recently had begun to grasp were short-lived. Martial Law was officially declared in Poland on the winter morning of December 13<sup>th</sup>, 1981. At 6:00 am sharp, Wojciech Jaruzelski, the Polish Prime Minister, appeared on the screens of Polish homes throughout the country and announced: "I declare that today, the army council of national salvation, has been constituted. The council of state, obeying the constitution, declared a state of war (at midnight) on the territory of Poland."<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> *Solidarność. Największy Ruch Społeczny w Dziejach Świata*, video.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>312</sup> Paul Kengor, *A Pope and a President: John Paul II, Ronald Reagan, and the Extraordinary Untold Story of the 20th Century* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2017), 269.

<sup>313</sup> "13 December: Martial Law in Poland," Communications Unlimited, December 13, 2020, <https://www.communications-unlimited.nl/13-december-martial-law-in-poland-3-2-3/>.

After Jaruzelski concluded his depressing speech, making false claims that Poland was “on the verge of an abyss,” and that “chaos and demoralization have reached the level of defeat,” the communist campaign to crush the Solidarity Movement officially began. T-55A tanks and bright blue armored combat vehicles with the bold, white letters *Milicja* began to flood the streets in an effort to overpower any possible strikes. All gatherings and demonstrations were banned, and thousands of activists from the Solidarity Movement along with its leaders were imprisoned. Full censorship was once again in place. Telephone lines were cut off, independent printing equipment was taken away, a curfew was imposed, citizens over the age of 13 had to carry identification cards, and the six-day work week was reintroduced. Even with the introduction of these violent measures, the opposition did not succeed in eliminating its adversary. The Solidarity Movement survived by moving itself underground. In fact, this is how Solidarity would function until 1989, when the first “free” elections in Poland took place.

The imposition of martial law gained attention worldwide, specifically from Western leaders such as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Reagan, in particular, was very alarmed by the imposition of martial law in Poland. He recognized Poland as the “linchpin in the dissolution of the Soviet Empire” and couldn’t risk the elimination of the *Solidarność*.<sup>314</sup> He knew that Poles needed the support of the West in order to keep the Solidarity Movement going. In addition to aiding Poland, Reagan recognized early on that the Polish pope was the key to taking down the whole communist bloc. Paul Kengor describes in his book, *The Divine Plan*, that when Reagan and his foreign policy advisor, Richard V. Allen, were watching the 1979 pilgrimage in Reagan’s home, the president was deeply moved by the pope’s visit. He saw how greatly the pope influenced and affected people. He quickly realized that he needed “to reach out to the new pope and the Vatican and make them an ally. ‘Dick, that’s it,’ Reagan said. That’s it.”<sup>315</sup> James Rosebush also is quoted in Kengor’s book, stating the following about Reagan’s perspective on the Pope:

Reagan, remember, always wanted to establish relationships with other people who felt could further his mission, so you have to think of Reagan having a lifelong mission...it wasn’t just John Paul’s position at the time in the church, it was the spirit with which the pope thought, moved, and inspired people. And when Reagan saw the inspiration that the pope brought to the people of Poland, he thought this an opportunity to make a compact with someone with whom [he] shared values and a commitment.<sup>316</sup>

Therefore, between building a relationship with John Paul II and the Vatican and aspiring to liberate Poland, Reagan’s famous Cold War policy, “We win, and they lose,” entered its initial stages.

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<sup>314</sup> Paul Kengor, *A Pope and a President: John Paul II, Ronald Reagan, and the Extraordinary Untold Story of the 20th Century* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2017), 193.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

## Chapter 4: John Paul II and Ronald Reagan Join Forces

*Like John Paul II, Ronald Reagan recognized that the decisive error of communism lay in the ideology's disregard for human dignity and innate human rights. Both were committed to taking down atheistic communism in order to free the hundreds of millions of people living under Soviet oppression. These two historic figures believed that each human being was ordained by God for a specific purpose and that every life had value. Freedom and the dignity of human life were at the core of this mission for John Paul II and Ronald Reagan. The only way they could save lives, protect the dignity of the human person, and stop communism from spreading was to take down the Soviet Union and the communist ideology that fueled all these misfortunes. John Paul II and Ronald Reagan were a great team because they had "a unity of spiritual view and a unity of vision on the Soviet empire: that right or correctness would ultimately prevail in the divine plan."<sup>317</sup> Their moral and political missions were on the same path. Further, both men knew that if the Vatican and West could provide money and resources to Poland's underground Solidarity movement and destabilize the Polish government, Poland would have a fighting chance to break free from Soviet shackles. This, they also believed, would eventually free the rest of the Eastern Bloc. These leaders gave the Poles hope that maybe things could change one day in their country. Reagan once shared with the pope, "Hope remains in Poland. We, working together, can keep it alive."<sup>318</sup> This chapter will explain the joint mission of the United States and the Vatican and how the partnership of the pope and the president ultimately saved Central and Eastern Europe from Soviet communism. Furthermore, it will explain how the Reagan Administration's strategy and statecraft successfully aided Poland from the imposition of martial law in 1981 until the end of Reagan's term in 1989. A particular focus is given to the CIA's political warfare operation known as QRHELPFUL.*

### What Kind of Relationship did John Paul II and Ronald Reagan Share?

The nature of John Paul II and Ronald Reagan's relationship is often debated. Some experts classify the relationship between the two as a "Holy Alliance," while others would refer to it more as a partnership with a common objective. The term "Holy Alliance" was first coined in a *TIME* magazine piece written by Carl Bernstein in 1992.<sup>319</sup> Since the publication, experts such as George Weigel have come out to proclaim that the hypothesis is "an interesting reminder that viewing history through exclusively political-economic lenses fails to capture the human and moral texture of great events."<sup>320</sup> Richard V. Allen refers to the relationship as two figures who were "moving along 'parallel tracks' with a common 'convergence of interests.'"<sup>321</sup> Regardless

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Carl Bernstein, "The Holy Alliance: Ronald Reagan and John Paul II," *TIME*, February 24, 1992, <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,974931-7,00.html>.

<sup>320</sup> George Weigel, "The Pope's Divisions," *The Washington Post*, September 22, 1996, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/entertainment/books/1996/09/22/the-popes-divisions/cf1d1735-450e-46e1-bd59-39fda4ee0ad8/>.

<sup>321</sup> Kengor, *A Pope and a President*, 584.



of one's take on their relationship, both saw Soviet communism as a great source of evil in the world, which was destroying human freedom and dignity. John Paul II focused more on proclaiming the gospel, while Reagan had a mission "to protect freedom . . . to protect it from Communist tyranny."<sup>322</sup> In order to preserve freedom and protect human dignity, two principles these men valued immensely, it was critical for the USSR to be taken down. These world figures ultimately joined forces to take down the Evil Empire together and battle it from both a spiritual and political perspective.

### **Reagan's Determination to Save Solidarity**

Reagan saw the Solidarity Movement as the first wave of democracy in the Communist Bloc. Both John Paul II and Reagan knew that the freedom of Poland could create a domino effect that would eventually free other nations in Central and Eastern Europe from the Soviets. Therefore, when martial law was declared, Richard Pipes says that Reagan "was absolutely livid" and stated, "Something must be done. We need to hit them hard and save Solidarity."<sup>323</sup> The situation in Poland presented an opportunity for the United States finally to go against the dominant Cold War strategies of containment and détente, and now adopt the bold strategy of rollback. Reagan was the perfect president to impose these more assertive measures. Compared to presidents of the previous few decades, he had a kind of zeal to him, an obligation to guarantee democracy and freedom for all peoples, and a strong determination to take down the Soviet Union. He would not repeat another Yalta nor allow Poles or other nations of the Soviet Bloc to feel abandoned again. In declassified minutes from an NSC meeting held on December 21<sup>st</sup> Reagan reportedly stated, "There may never be another chance! Poland needed to be supported and saved now."<sup>324</sup> He reiterates the same message in his diary entry for that day:

I took a stand that this may be the last chance in our lifetime to see a change in the Soviet Empire's colonial policy re Eastern Europe. We should take a stand & tell them unless & until martial law is lifted in Poland, the prisoners were released and negotiations resumed between Walesa & the Polish govt. We would quarantine the Soviets & Poland with no trade, or communication across their borders.<sup>325</sup>

Reagan could not lose the opportunity to seize the momentum that this tragic event could provide. It was imperative to act immediately and finally "go against this damned force" as he stated in a December 22<sup>nd</sup> NSC meeting.<sup>326</sup> The next day, December 23<sup>rd</sup>, Reagan did just that. He addressed the nation from his Oval Office to offer warm Christmas and holiday wishes, but more importantly, he took this address as his opportunity to condemn the Soviet Union's recent actions in Poland. He stated the following powerful words that evening:

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<sup>322</sup> Kengor and Orlando, 33.

<sup>323</sup> Kengor, *A Pope and a President*, 272.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*

For a thousand years, Christmas has been celebrated in Poland, a land of deep religious faith, but this Christmas brings little joy to the courageous Polish people. They have been betrayed by their own government.

The men who rule them and their totalitarian allies fear the very freedom that the Polish people cherish. They have answered the stirrings of liberty with brute force, killings, mass arrests, and the setting up of concentration camps. Lech Walesa and other Solidarity leaders are imprisoned, their fate unknown. Factories, mines, universities, and homes have been assaulted.

The target of this depression [repression] is the Solidarity Movement, but in attacking Solidarity its enemies attack an entire people. Ten million of Poland's 36 million citizens are members of Solidarity. Taken together with their families, they account for the overwhelming majority of the Polish nation. By persecuting Solidarity the Polish Government wages war against its own people.

I want emphatically to state tonight that if the outrages in Poland do not cease, we cannot and will not conduct "business as usual" with the perpetrators and those who aid and abet them. Make no mistake, their crime will cost them dearly in their future dealings with America and free peoples everywhere. I do not make this statement lightly or without serious reflection.

But to underscore our fundamental opposition to the repressive actions taken by the Polish Government against its own people, the administration has suspended all government-sponsored shipments of agricultural and dairy products to the Polish Government. This suspension will remain in force until absolute assurances are received that distribution of these products is monitored and guaranteed by independent agencies. We must be sure that every bit of food provided by America goes to the Polish people, not to their oppressors.

The United States is taking immediate action to suspend major elements of our economic relationships with the Polish Government. We have halted the renewal of the Export-Import Bank's line of export credit insurance to the Polish Government. We will suspend Polish civil aviation privileges in the United States. We are suspending the right of Poland's fishing fleet to operate in American waters. And we're proposing to our allies the further restriction of high technology exports to Poland.

These actions are not directed against the Polish people. They are a warning to the Government of Poland that free men cannot and will not stand idly by in the face of brutal repression.<sup>327</sup>

However, before Reagan went forth with imposing the economic and political sanctions he had promised, he performed a seemingly small act that held great significance. Toward the end of his holiday address, he asked the American people to show their solidarity with the people

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<sup>327</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation about Christmas and the Situation in Poland," National Archives, December 23, 1981, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/address-nation-about-christmas-and-situation-poland>.

of Poland by lighting a candle and then placing it in front of their windows. This was in accordance with the wishes of Ambassador Romulad Spasowski, who had defected to the United States only days prior. He had met with Reagan the day before this public address, urging him to continue supporting the Polish people and not to underestimate the power of his efforts such as Radio Free Europe. Therefore, to pay his respects to the Poles, Reagan passed on Spasowski's request in an effort to "keep the flame of liberty alive." He further stated:

Let the light of millions of candles in American homes give notice that the light of freedom is not going to be extinguished. We are blessed with a freedom and abundance denied to so many.<sup>328</sup>

With these words, it becomes obvious that Reagan's fight for the Poles was not only political in nature, but it became a very personal matter to him as well.

### **The Foundation for the "Friendly Alliance" Begins**

In addition to a public address condemning martial law, President Reagan sent a private cable message personally to John Paul II on December 17<sup>th</sup>. This top-secret message was sent to the American embassy in Rome and later delivered to the Vatican Office. The title of this cable was "Presidential Message to the Pope on the Polish situation." In the cable, he proclaimed his and the United States' support for the Poles during this tragic time, and he further urged the pope to use his influence to try to make a change: "I strongly urge Your Holiness to draw on the great authority that you and the Church command in Poland to urge General Jaruzelski to agree to a conference involving himself, Archbishop Glemp, and Lech Wałęsa... The United States is prepared to support the search for peace in Poland any way it can."<sup>329</sup>

This cable would be the first of many "letters, cables, diplomatic pouches, liaisons, and telephone calls" shared between the two throughout the years.<sup>330</sup> It is estimated that even before 1981 ended, the pope and the president had already "exchanged a dozen or so letters."<sup>331</sup> Although the majority of the information passed between the two is classified, one can infer that all these messages shared the main objective of restoring freedom in Poland, as well as the Soviet sphere at large. A Vatican diplomat known as Archbishop Achille Silvertrini confirmed that the pope "saw the Reagan administration and the Vatican as partners with the shared objective of resisting Soviet communism, especially in his homeland."<sup>332</sup> Silvertrini explained that although it is not the place of the Holy See to take a position on political matters, and that the role of the Vatican is to focus more so on the moral plane, "the two planes (politics and morality) can be complementary when they have the same objective. In this case, they are complementary because both the Holy See and the United States have the same objective – the

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Kengor, *A Pope and a President*, 275.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 276.

restoration of liberty in Poland.”<sup>333</sup> Establishing this shared moral and political objective was the beginning of Reagan’s and John Paul II’s partnership or “alliance” that would set the tone for their first official meeting at the Vatican on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1982.

Even though not much from this meeting at the Vatican Library is disclosed, and the notes on this meeting will not be released until 2057 (75 years), some specific details were shared by Archbishop Laghi and Bill Clark. Laghi stated that Reagan first and foremost addressed the painful memory of their assassinations, only six weeks apart, and how he believed that the heavens had spared the two from death. Reagan declared, “Look how the evil forces were put in our way and how Providence intervened.”<sup>334</sup> According to Bill Clark, the two discussed that this miraculous intervention happened because the leaders were meant to pursue “a spiritual mission – a special role in the divine plan of life.”<sup>335</sup> The two were not only in line when it came to the politics of the Soviets, but here they were confirming that they were on the same page spiritually.

The foundation for the pope and the president’s personal relationship based on their shared mission was officially formed on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1982. This fifty-minute meeting was the first of four other face-to-face meetings that would take place between the two of them. However, this initial meeting can be labeled as one of the most significant meetings, because not only did it establish their common objective of overcoming Soviet communism, and more so, their shared commitment to starting the “chain reaction” in Poland, but it moreover led to turning their “lofty divine mission into a practical policy mission to sustain the Solidarity movement in Poland.”<sup>336</sup> The meeting took their personal visions and turned them into realities. According to Carl Bernstein, Reagan and John Paul II also agreed that day to “undertake a clandestine campaign to hasten the dissolution of the communist empire.”<sup>337</sup> The core of this clandestine campaign between D.C. and the Holy See would be an intelligence-sharing relationship.

George Weigel shares a different perspective on the situation: “But the claim that the two men entered into a conspiracy to effect the downfall of European communism is journalistic fantasy...Reagan’s decision to share U.S. intelligence with John Paul was appreciated, but John Paul had his own extensive sources of information in east central Europe, and there is no evidence that anything he learned from U.S. satellite photography or other intelligence sources made any fundamental change in his view of a situation or in his action...They pursued different paths to the same goal. There was no conspiracy.”<sup>338</sup>

### **Intelligence Sharing Between the Vatican and the U.S.**

The depths and effects of this intelligence relationship can be debated, but it cannot be denied that the Vatican and the pope became critical intelligence assets to communicate

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>337</sup> Bernstein, op. cit., 1.

<sup>338</sup> Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 441.

information between the Reagan administration and what was going on “on the ground” in Poland. Accordingly, the Reagan team would also share their intel on Poland and the Soviets with the pope and the Vatican, who would then channel the given information to Solidarity leaders/members or Church officials. The information that the Reagan administration received was “often culled from high-tech intelligence gathering, whereas the Vatican’s typically came from sources on the ground.”<sup>339</sup> In fact, Frank Shakespeare claims that a lot of this “on the ground” information the Vatican received came from priests who shared what people told them in the confessionals. Shakespeare further states, “John Paul II got some of the best intel from the confessional.”<sup>340</sup> This was only one of many creative ways intel was exchanged during these times.

Another clever way in which Reagan’s security advisors worked with the Vatican to share and exchange intelligence with the pope and his advisors was through a method Paul Kengor dubs “cappuccino diplomacy.” Bill Casey from the CIA, Bill Clark from the National Security Council, and Archbishop Pio Laghi, who served on behalf of the Vatican as the apostolic nuncio in Washington, were three figures who formed a partnership or alliance of their own.<sup>341</sup> The three would sometimes meet as often as once a week to exchange critical intelligence and information regarding new developments in the Cold War. They were particularly concerned with issues relating to Poland, though other general topics affecting Rome and D.C. were also discussed. This information would then be channeled back to either the pope or Reagan. Due to the nature of the information, they would often meet in person, and no note-takers or third parties were allowed to be present during the meetings.

Since the three were cautious not exchange information over the phone, Clark or Casey would signal they needed to meet with Archbishop Laghi by asking one another, “Would you like to have some cappuccino?”<sup>342</sup> This derived from the fact that Pio Laghi would always be sure to prepare good quality, Italian coffee when with Clark and Casey. The three would often meet at Laghi’s home, but also on occasion, the more dire information would require that Laghi meet with Clark, Casey, and President Reagan at the White House. Intelligence exchange was not limited to only these three figures; Ambassador Vernon Walters, the former deputy director of the CIA, was also involved. Often Casey and Walters would fly together to the Vatican in order to exchange crucial information and even at times “show the pope satellite photographs and other evidence of Soviet troop movements and missile installations in Eastern Europe.”<sup>343</sup> With the Soviet movement becoming more of a threat, exchanging intelligence would not be enough. To aid Poland efficiently, the West needed to provide money and resources to the underground Solidarity movement. What is not known by many is that Reagan and his team began their covert mission to aid Poland even before the CIA became officially involved in 1982.

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<sup>339</sup> Kengor, *A Pope and a President*, 304.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> Kengor and Orlando, *The Divine Plan*, 149.

<sup>342</sup> Kengor, *A Pope and a President*, 304.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 288.

## The Beginnings of Aid to Poland

William Casey, Reagan's CIA director, took immediate action after the imposition of martial law in 1981. First, Casey established an "informal relationship" with John Paul II to keep himself informed on the internal affairs of Poland. Second, he instructed his son-in-law, Owen Smith, "to use his own money to buy printing equipment worth tens of thousands of dollars and dispatch it to the Vatican to be smuggled into Poland."<sup>344</sup> Casey acted privately and unofficially, because he understood the dire need of the situation. He could not risk dealing with bureaucracy, the détente supporters, or the obstacles of the agency which "lacked Polish-speaking personnel and sophistication to comprehend the intricacies of Poland's political underground."<sup>345</sup> On the more visible side of the CIA, establishing official covert assistance to the Solidarity Movement was the next step, but there were debates within the Reagan security team on how to go about this.

At first, there were thoughts that maybe the CIA should arm Solidarity with weapons; however, this was not the best solution, considering that Western weapons could trigger a Soviet invasion, and an armed Soviet opposition could easily take down the Solidarity members. Repeating a scenario that recalled the bloodshed of Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, or most recently at the time Afghanistan, was not in the interest of the CIA. In addition, the US could not risk the escalation of a possible nuclear war with the Soviets. Richard Pipes stated, "Solidarity didn't need or want arms."<sup>346</sup> The real battle against communism was a battle of the mind. Just like John Paul II's 1979 pilgrimage, the strongest "weapon" the CIA could provide the Poles with was a message of hope--a message that signaled, "The West is still with you, do not give up your efforts." As Ambassador Spasowski mentioned to Reagan on the day of their meeting in December, "Please, sir, do not ever underestimate how many millions of people still listen to that channel [Radio Free Europe] behind the Iron Curtain."<sup>347</sup> It was critical that the communists did not hold a monopoly on the information that was flowing through Poland and the Soviet bloc at large. Thus began the CIA operation, QRHELPFUL, to aid Solidarity.

## QRHELPFUL Waged Political Warfare in Poland

On October 8, 1982, President Jaruzelski officially declared that *Solidarność* was outlawed. Reagan responded the next day with a courageous radio address defending the Poles. One powerful line of the announcement stated, "Those who know Poland well understand that as long as the flame of freedom burns as brightly and intensely in the hearts of Polish men and

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<sup>344</sup> Marek Chodakiewicz, "The CIA and 'Solidarity,'" The Institute of World Politics, June 11, 2019, <https://www.iwp.edu/articles/2019/03/17/the-cia-and-solidarity/>.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> Seth G Jones, *A Covert Action, Reagan, the CIA, and the Cold War Struggle in Poland* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2018), 128.

<sup>347</sup> Kengor, *A Pope and a President*, 283.

women as it does today, the spirit of Solidarity will remain a vital force in Poland.”<sup>348</sup> This is important to note because Solidarity would continue in Poland “with or without Western aid.”<sup>349</sup> Although the official tally of Solidarity members totaled 10 million, with the inclusion of families almost 90% of all Poles were a part of the free trade union.<sup>350</sup> From 1981 until 1989, Solidarity survived as an underground movement. By 1989, the Communists were forced to negotiate with Solidarity due to a plethora of economic and social issues they had created. In addition, by 1989 Solidarity became “too big and too broad to repress.”<sup>351</sup> Although Solidarity would have survived and fought without the help of the West, evidence shows that the external aid “was undoubtedly helpful for an opposition movement that was cash and material starved to run an underground political movement.”<sup>352</sup> Still, it should be noted that most of the aid from the CIA did not funnel into Poland until the late 1980s. In fact, “over one-third came in 1989 alone.”<sup>353</sup> Solidarity survived on its own right after the imposition of martial law for one year and three months, until the CIA’s covert help was officially implemented.

On November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1982, Reagan signed a presidential finding with the following goals: “to aid the organizational activities of Solidarity and other Polish opposition groups, improve their ability to communicate with the Polish people inside and outside the country, and put more pressure on the Jaruzelski regime to ease its repressive policies.”<sup>354</sup> This established that the battle in Poland would be psychological in nature, as covert assistance would be dedicated to aiding the underground information channels of Solidarity. Thus, four months later on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1983, the CIA’s covert program to aid Poland was officially assigned the cryptonym QRHELPFUL, with “its own file and financial authorization number.”<sup>355</sup> QRHELPFUL was sure to hide the U.S. government’s involvement by using surrogate third parties to transfer their money and provide nonlethal equipment to intermediaries, who could then pass the funds or equipment to Solidarity. It should be noted that surrogates were not active Solidarity members, but rather, “non-U.S. government individuals” such as “philanthropists, publishers, smugglers, and others.”<sup>356</sup> By the middle of 1984, QRHELPFUL had recruited around 30 assets to accomplish a broad range of activities.

Assets were composed of three categories. The first group was known as the covert action assets, who oversaw the movement of material and cash into Poland and were responsible for recruiting more activists. The second group was recognized as the media assets, who were in charge of bringing more attention to the Solidarity movement by organizing demonstrations,

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<sup>348</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Radio Address to the Nation on Solidarity and United States Relations with Poland,” The American Presidency Project, October 9, 1982, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/radio-address-the-nation-solidarity-and-united-states-relations-with-poland>.

<sup>349</sup> Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, “The CIA and ‘Solidarity,’” The Institute of World Politics, March 17, 2019, <https://www.iwp.edu/articles/2019/03/17/the-cia-and-solidarity/>.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

<sup>351</sup> Kelly Hignett, “The Evolution of the Polish Solidarity Movement,” The View East, February 6, 2009, <https://thevieweast.wordpress.com/tag/solidarity/>.

<sup>352</sup> Jones, *A Covert Action*, 306.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 304.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 156.

publishing articles, holding discussions with reporters, and so forth. The last group was labeled as the surrogate funders, who raised money and then “moved it through clandestine human networks to Solidarity offices and individuals in Poland, Belgium, and other countries throughout Europe.”<sup>357</sup> Each asset group was critical to the network of the CIA and vital for this political warfare mission. However, one major problem presented itself, namely that the CIA needed to transport money and materials into Poland without the Warsaw Pact intelligence agencies or the KGB catching on. Soviet and Polish authorities viewed Western aid from Western governments and organizations in the Soviet sphere as an effort to “undermine their power and legitimacy.”<sup>358</sup> Further, if the “Western hand” was ever caught, it would give the Soviets a reason to intervene and claim the Solidarity Movement was a “tool of foreign intelligence agencies,” so they could shut it down.<sup>359</sup> Therefore, the best way to keep Western involvement away from Soviet intelligence was through the use of “ratlines.”

### **Smuggling Materials, Equipment, and Money for Solidarity**

Ratlines utilized third-party individuals to “covertly smuggle material, people, and money” from Western Europe into Poland through special, hidden routes.<sup>360</sup> Many of these third-party individuals, or smugglers, had no idea they were working in partnership with CIA case officers. For example, some assets even used Catholic Church officials such as priests to sneak CIA money through the border, as they “were not subject to border controls and could carry money and equipment into Poland with little risk of being searched.”<sup>361</sup> It should be noted that the use of Catholic clergy did not occur often and resulted in a collective transfer of less than \$50,000 out of a \$20 million operation.<sup>362</sup> These various individuals and smugglers were unaware of the origin of the cash and materials as they did not have any direct contact with CIA case officers. By the time the money and goods had reached the underground Solidarity members, “they had moved through such a complex web of people, companies, foundations, and geographic locations that it was difficult for anyone – including Solidarity members, the Polish government, and perhaps even the CIA -- to keep track of where it was going.”<sup>363</sup> Although this method of secrecy was necessary, it left the CIA questioning who exactly was receiving the funds and materials, and how effective their efforts were. This secrecy also caused the delivery of equipment and money sometimes to extend for months or even longer to reach the underground. Assets did what they could to ensure the safe movement of goods and to protect their network and ratlines.

Smugglers had to come up with creative methods to pass money and equipment from the West, especially when shipments involved large items such as printing devices and copiers. One

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<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 165.



Polish émigré, code-named by Seth G. Jones as “Stanisław Broda,” developed an extensive network with various ratlines and creative transportation methods. For example, one of his connections was a Turkish émigré who owned and operated a coat factory close to Warsaw. When his shipment of Italian sheepskins reached Western Germany, his workers would add Solidarity materials to the trucks, which would then be passed on to the Solidarity activists once the cargo reached Poland. As it was too risky to place a phone call indicating that a shipment had arrived, Broda would usually send a coded postcard signaling a truck, ship, or person was on the way. Assets such as Broda were particularly involved in passing equipment through Sweden, as its location was optimal for reaching Gdańsk. It is recorded that “somewhere between one quarter and one half of all material entering Poland arrived from Sweden.”<sup>364</sup> In fact, Bill Casey even met with Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme in hopes of creating a pipeline that would regularly ship materials and money from Sweden to Poland. Although Sweden was a neutral State and held a non-intervention approach to politics, Palme agreed to establish the pipeline and operate Solidarity shipments in Sweden.

With the security of being able to use Swedish ports and ships to move materials across the Baltic, smugglers would often purchase materials in Western European cities (Paris, Brussels, Hamburg, etc.) and then repack and ship them to Stockholm. Jones explains that upon materials arriving in Sweden, everything would be packaged into containers which were then “relabelled and placed on crates in ships marked as *tractor parts, machine tools, or fish products*.”<sup>365</sup> Nor did the creativity stop there; smugglers would fill fire extinguishers with propaganda materials, ink and silkscreen emulsion were hidden in bottles of Hershey’s chocolate syrup and canned food, publications were sealed into waterproof wrapping and then inserted into canned soups, and Broda even reconfigured a refrigeration truck to include a dividing wall which created a “hidden compartment that could fit up to ten offset printers.”<sup>366</sup> Broda and the other smugglers were committed to purchasing and then transporting the concealed duplicators, fax machines, copiers, printers, paint, books, and other similar material through trucks, boats, ships, and tour buses. In addition, Broda and the other CIA assets were known to hide contraband in humanitarian aid shipments whose trucks did not require an extensive border check search. This is because the customs check for these shipments took place at the points of origin (West Germany, Sweden, etc.) rather than at border crossings.<sup>367</sup> After the trucks were inspected, CIA assets would then load the contraband inside. However, assets were also sure to remove the materials and goods before the final arrival in Poland. Smuggling was a complicated, yet necessary process.

Another famous asset officially known as Piotr Jegliński was also highly involved in smuggling money, materials, and supplies such as book staplers, stencils, magazines, printing equipment, and the like into Poland. Like asset Broda, asset Jegliński was also from the main CIA hub located in Paris. In addition to transporting supplies and cash into Poland, Jegliński was

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<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid., 169, 170.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 170.

responsible for organizing financial aid to go towards a Polish journal at the time. He strongly believed in the power of the press and of words. At one-point Jegliński had taken photos of pages of various banned books, and then reprinted the photographed pages; however, this method was not very successful as the printed pages were often unreadable. He further decided it would be best to use duplicators and “even purchased a small spirit duplicator, disassembled it, and worked with a theater group traveling to Poland to smuggle it into the country.”<sup>368</sup> These efforts were all critical to keeping publications such as *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, *Kultura*, *Aneks*, and other written works alive. After the necessary supplies, equipment, and materials were collected, it was critical to pass the goods onto print shops and into the homes of activists so they could begin printing the illegal works.

Secret, underground printing shops and centers were spread throughout Poland. The CIA had a collective list of all print shop sites in the country. The print shops were often in hidden locations with “fake walls, entrances through wardrobes, partition walls with fake chimneys,”<sup>369</sup> or they were in normal buildings registered with the government as small businesses. Homes with hidden print shops and disguised small businesses were quite often inspected by authorities; however, due to the discreetness of the activists and the hidden locations, most shops were never discovered. One of the main printing shops for the Solidarity movement was located in Gdańsk in the basement home of activist Lechosław Witkowski. Activists and underground distributors would enter Witkowski’s hidden print shop “through a trap door located under the refrigerator.”<sup>370</sup> It also was not uncommon to find print shops in the cellars of houses, or even to have duplicators simply placed “in a kitchen or bathroom” where individuals could “make dinner or bathe their children during breaks in the printing cycle.”<sup>371</sup> Similar home equipment setups were witnessed with fax machines, photocopiers, and typewriters.

Just as it was important to print and create the various publications, it was equally important to distribute the dissident publications to the Polish people. This process also required a clandestine network and hidden routes. Distributors would usually carry the printed publications, poems, and books in “rucksacks, suitcases, bags, and sacks” through the dark city streets.<sup>372</sup> Some underground distributors got creative with their transportation methods, one asset had “tied printed material to his shoulder with string, hidden under his coat.”<sup>373</sup> The distributors’ various traveled routes were secret and changed every so often to avoid tracking from authorities. The goal was to safely leave the materials at the selected drop box or “dead drop” (drains, tree holes, under rocks, church pews, etc.) to avoid coming face to face with the recipient. Despite the usual success of avoiding detection, there were occasional cases of Solidarity distributors being caught. One example of this was activist Pawel Bąkowski, who had to jump out of a moving train in Warsaw after authorities identified him. Bąkowski was traveling with a backpack full of “Tomasz Jastrun’s books of underground poems, *Na skrzyżowaniu Azji I*

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid., 176.

*Europy* (On the Crossroads of Asia and Europe).”<sup>374</sup> In order to save the publications, he ran to the Vistula River after rolling out of the train and hid his bag in the bushes so he could pick it up the next day safely. Without distributors such as Bąkowski willing to risk their lives and freedom, the final, key part of QRHELPFUL could not have been completed. The end goal was to distribute the various works and materials to the intended audiences.

This underground political warfare was not limited to printed material; radio was also a critical component for influencing Poles. CIA money was used to purchase portable radio transmitters, which were distributed to citizens and sometimes hidden on roofs or other discrete locations. For example, Radio Solidarity which supplied “messages from the underground...was broadcast from the roof of a building on Grojecka Street” and “went on air from multiple, roving locations.”<sup>375</sup> Radio was also used to air messages from mainstream outlets such as Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, Vatican Radio, and others. Lastly, radios had the dual purpose of being used as secret listening devices. For example, activist Zygmunt Błażek used radio parts to construct a spy device “for listening in on the ZOMO.”<sup>376</sup> He would tuck the radio antenna “onto the window frame” of his house so it would not look suspicious and was able to successfully record, decrypt, and intercept ZOMO messages.<sup>377</sup>

## **The Results of QRHELPFUL**

These efforts would not have been nearly as successful, or perhaps even possible, without funding coming from the CIA and other organizations. Although CIA aid ranked the highest in terms of aid at \$20 million, the National Endowment for Democracy came in second place by supporting Solidarity and various Polish programs with a total of \$9 million.<sup>378</sup> It should be noted that the \$4 million in funding from the AFL-CIO (The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations) “was subsumed under the National Endowment for Democracy.”<sup>379</sup> There was also a smaller contribution of funds coming from Polish ethnic organizations, the Vatican, labor unions, humanitarian organizations, and even non-governmental organizations from Japan, Canada, and Australia, though there is little data indicating the amount of money these organizations donated and how their donations were utilized for the movement.

Above all, it is critical to mention that most of this funding did not come into Poland until the end of the 1980s. For example, funding from the National Endowment for Democracy reached \$1,375,000 in 1988 and \$1,435,000 in 1989, while funding from 1984 until 1987 was only \$1,556,913 collectively.<sup>380</sup> This means that after the crackdown of martial law, Solidarity largely survived on its own for a year and three months until QRHELPFUL was implemented in

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid., 177, 306.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., 304.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 304.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 305.

November of 1982. The first official, recorded movement of cash from the CIA began in January 1983 after John Stein, CIA deputy director for operations, requested that \$1 million should be released from “the Contingency Reserve Fund to jump-start covert aid to Solidarity.”<sup>381</sup> As mentioned, QRHELPFUL was the biggest source of aid for Solidarity overall, particularly from 1983 until 1985 when Solidarity’s main objective was just trying to survive. Despite funds coming in late, it cannot be denied that CIA aid “was undoubtedly helpful for an opposition movement that was cash and material starved to run an underground political movement – especially in the initial years after martial law.”<sup>382</sup>

The main objective of QRHELPFUL was to pass on “printing materials, communications equipment, and other supplies for waging underground political warfare.”<sup>383</sup> Without these efforts, it would have been significantly more difficult to spread awareness about the Solidarity movement and its activism. Moreover, the overarching reason for conducting this political warfare campaign was to let Poles know there was indeed hope for a better future one day and that the control of the regime would only be temporary. Reading pages from *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, which presented “news reports, editorials, Solidarity events, and columns by well-known writers and activists,” or hearing Reagan’s voice on Radio Liberty was what gave many Poles the strength to keep going.<sup>384</sup> Craig Shirley once interviewed a group of Polish journalists who shared that it was “the words of Ronald Reagan and the words of John Paul II” which encouraged them to continue their efforts.<sup>385</sup> It was critical for Poles to know that the West was on their side, and that Solidarity would not perish under martial law. In addition, it was not expected that QRHELPFUL would take down the Soviet Union, yet without its assistance, the future success of Solidarity could have been limited.

QRHELPFUL would not have been successful without the brave men and women of Solidarity, along with the assets and distributors working, usually unknowingly, alongside the CIA. Through their efforts cash, typewriters, fax machines, printers, ink, and various other supplies were successfully smuggled through the Polish border from key Western Europe countries such as France, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, and West Germany. Assets and their networks covertly brought in millions of dollars worth of material, though there is limited data explaining exactly how the funds were used by Solidarity, and who received it in the end. Assets were keen to keep their networks, sources, and routes hidden, while “CIA case officers had limited control over the program.”<sup>386</sup> Still, this was the nature of QRHELPFUL, and without this level of secrecy, the CIA and the “Western hand” risked being exposed. Revealing CIA involvement would have significantly undermined the legitimacy of the movement.<sup>387</sup> Lastly, it should be noted that due to the close intelligence-sharing relationship between the Vatican and the U.S., “The pope knew that our CIA was clandestinely assisting the Solidarity movement in

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>385</sup> Kengor and Orlando, *The Divine Plan*, 144.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 308.

Poland.”<sup>388</sup> Author Paul Kengor also notes that due to the high-profile information Bill Casey often shared with the Vatican, “it seems difficult to imagine that the CIA director did not pass along this information.”<sup>389</sup> Further, even if the role of the pope is to be a figure of peace and hold neutral political views, it can be inferred that John Paul II supported this peaceful operation to aid solidarity.

In addition to the pope, Polish agencies and the KGB also knew that the CIA and the West were funding Solidarity. SB records show how authorities managed to confiscate millions of posters, leaflets, papers, journals, and books, as well as equipment such as Xerox machines, duplicators, typewriters, and offset presses. Despite this, Polish and Soviet authorities never collected concrete evidence of CIA support. Overall, it can be debated to what extent covert assistance from the CIA helped Solidarity, but what cannot be denied is that it “provided money and resources to help Solidarity organize demonstrations, distribute newspapers and leaflets, run radio stations, and break into Polish television programs that boosted the opposition's local support, morale, and effectiveness.”<sup>390</sup> QRHELPFUL demonstrated the effectiveness of political warfare and proved that the power of words can ultimately be more effective than weapons. It was a psychological and informational operation against the Soviet government. Notably, this tool of foreign policy follows John Paul II’s message of “fighting evil with good” and presented a nonviolent opposition.

### **The Reagan Administration’s Tools of Statecraft and Strategy Used to Aid Poland**

Although political warfare was a significant part of aiding Poland and Solidarity, the efforts of the Reagan Administration also included an economic and political strategy as well as an array of public diplomacy actions. Politically, Reagan introduced a series of National Security Decision Directives (NSDD) with various objectives. These documents “created [the] official Reagan administration policy” and provided specific goals for the United States to achieve.<sup>391</sup> Among the most important of these regarding Poland are NSDDs 32, 45, 54, 66, and 75. The first of these directives, NSDD-32, titled “U.S. National Security Strategy,” officially established Reagan’s rollback strategy against the Soviet Union by stating that the United States would “contain and reverse the expansion of Soviet control and military presence throughout the world.”<sup>392</sup> Introduced in May of 1982, the document goes on to declare that the US would:

...deter military attack by the USSR and its allies against the US. . .strengthen the influence of the US throughout the world by strengthening existing alliances. . .neutralize the efforts of the USSR to increase its influence. . .limit Soviet military capabilities. . . ensure U.S. access to foreign markets. . .ensure U.S. access to space and the oceans. . . discourage further proliferation of nuclear weapons. . .encourage and strongly support aid, trade, and invest

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<sup>388</sup> Kengor, *A Pope and a President*, 291.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

<sup>390</sup> Jones, *A Covert Action*, 308.

<sup>391</sup> Paul Kengor, *A Pope and a President*, 287.

<sup>392</sup> Ronald Reagan, “U.S. National Security Strategy,” NSDD - National Security Decision Directives - Reagan Administration, May 20, 1982, <https://irp.fas.org/offdocs/nsdd/>.

programs. . .in the Third World. . .and promote a well-functioning international economic system.

Furthermore, the U.S. would use a wide range of statecraft, including economic, political, military, and informational means to accomplish these global objectives.<sup>393</sup> It was precisely with NSDD-32 that operation QRHELPFUL could begin. Next, NSDD-45, signed in July of 1982, complimented NSDD-32's national security strategy, as it was focused on "United States International Broadcasting" and described the objectives of stations such as Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and American Forces Radio and Television Services.<sup>394</sup>

Later that year, on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1982, Reagan signed NSDD-54 declaring the "United States Policy Toward Eastern Europe." The goal of this NSDD was to loosen Soviet control in the region and integrate the Warsaw Pact countries further into the West. The United States intended to achieve this by assuring human and civil rights in the region, supporting "liberal trends," encouraging more free trade, decentralizing Soviet economic and political control, and weakening the military capabilities of the Central and Eastern European countries, among other things of this nature.<sup>395</sup> This NSDD, like NSDD-32, reinforced Reagan's rollback strategy and eradicated the decades-old strategy of détente. Next, on November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1982, NSDD-66, titled "East-West Economic Relations and Poland-Related Sanctions," was implemented. This directive established that the United States and its allies were committed to limiting the purchase of Soviet gas and to seeking Western alternatives; desired to add "critical technologies and equipment to the COCOM (unified, military command) list" and "controls on advanced technology and equipment beyond the expanded COCOM list"; and lastly, intended to create an agreement based "on the recent OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) agreement" that would significantly raise interest rates to the USSR.<sup>396</sup>

Finally, in January 1983, NSDD-75, arguably the most important of the listed directives, was published. Titled, "U.S. Relations with the USSR," NSDD-75 intensified the rollback strategy by focusing on combatting Soviet imperialism. The document, as stated by Richard Pipes, the lead author of NSDD-75, "was a clear break from the past...At its root was the belief that we [the U.S.] had it in our power to alter the Soviet system through the use of external pressure."<sup>397</sup> The first task or goal was to "contain and over time reverse Soviet expansionism" in all sectors of society and international arenas.<sup>398</sup> This goal of tackling Soviet expansionism pertained specifically to the military power the USSR held and its geographical control of Central and Eastern European countries. The second task addressed how to decrease the power

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

<sup>394</sup> Ronald Reagan, "United States International Broadcasting," NSDD - National Security Decision Directives - Reagan Administration, July 15, 1982, <https://irp.fas.org/offdocs/nsdd/>.

<sup>395</sup> Ronald Reagan, "United States Policy Towards Eastern Europe," NSDD - National Security Decision Directives - Reagan Administration, September 2, 1982, <https://irp.fas.org/offdocs/nsdd/>.

<sup>396</sup> Ronald Reagan, "East-West Economic Relations & Poland-Related Sanctions," NSDD - National Security Decision Directives - Reagan Administration, November 29, 1982, <https://irp.fas.org/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-066.htm>.

<sup>397</sup> Jones, 200.

<sup>398</sup> Ronald Reagan, "U.S. Relations with the USSR," NSDD - National Security Decision Directives - Reagan Administration, January 17, 1983, <https://irp.fas.org/offdocs/nsdd/>.

and control of the ruling Russian elites. The US recognized that the Soviets' actions developed from the centuries-old Muskovite imperialist mentality and that "Soviet aggressiveness has deep roots in the internal system."<sup>399</sup> Therefore, the solution was to "promote the process of change in the Soviet Union toward a more pluralistic political and economic system,"<sup>400</sup> since the deeply rooted Russian mentality and the internal, elite system would be difficult to change. Simply put, the intention was to introduce the idea of a liberal democracy and a free-market economy.

The last task of NSDD-75 was to engage in agreements and negotiations with the Soviet Union which could "protect and enhance U.S. interests."<sup>401</sup> Each of these objectives aimed to "affirm the superiority of U.S. and Western values...over the oppressive features of Soviet Communism."<sup>402</sup> The document concludes with a firm statement that any "unacceptable behavior" from Moscow will be met with serious consequences, and that the listed objectives aim to create a stable and constructive correspondence, not an "open-ended, sterile confrontation," as witnessed in the past.<sup>403</sup> NSDD-75 was the official strategy and long-term plan for combatting communism and provided the only acceptable basis for future US and USSR relations. Overall, each of these NSDDs "laid the groundwork" and provided specific, strategic objectives on how to take down the Soviet Union.<sup>404</sup> Above all, these formal guidelines and objectives assured that the entire Reagan administration and team knew exactly how to approach the Soviet elites and their corrupt system.

Economically, Reagan imposed a series of sanctions against Jaruzelski's regime, such as "the suspension of agricultural shipments, termination of US credit insurance through the Export-Import bank, and cancellation of landing privileges for Polish planes at American airports."<sup>405</sup> Reagan also denied the Soviets technology, banned Poland's most-favored-nation trade status, forbade Polish fishermen from fishing on American waters, vetoed Poland's application to the International Monetary Fund, and even canceled scientific exchanges between the two nations. He made it clear that none of these measures were intended to hurt the Polish people but were necessary to send a message to Jaruzelski and his comrades. Unfortunately, there reached a point when the sanctions were not having the intended effect and began harming the citizens of Poland. Discussions between American and Vatican officials suggested that it would be best to remove some of the "smaller" sanctions and restrictions. Reagan responded by writing a letter to John Paul II in February of 1984 stating that he would comply with the requests to lift select sanctions. He wrote, "We are prepared to lift the ban on regularly scheduled LOT flights to the United States, permit the resumption of travel [and] begin on official – but highly confidential – dialogue" with the Polish regime.<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> Jones, 200.

<sup>403</sup> Ronald Reagan, "U.S. Relations with the USSR," NSDD - National Security Decision Directives - Reagan Administration, January 17, 1983, <https://irp.fas.org/offdocs/nsdd/>.

<sup>404</sup> Kengor, *A Pope and a President*, 287.

<sup>405</sup> Jones, 11.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid., 221.

Lastly, Reagan displayed acts of “soft power” or public diplomacy when aiding Poland. He made a noticeable effort in getting to know Polish culture and the Polish people. In his free time, Reagan requested to watch a movie smuggled from Poland, titled *Man of Iron*. This film took place in the Gdańsk Lenin Shipyard and acted out the critical August 1980 strike which led to the creation of the Solidarity Union. Reagan shared in his personal diary that after watching the film, it further inspired him in his mission of helping Poland and the Eastern Bloc. He wrote, “It was most moving & made all of us more determined than ever to help these people.”<sup>407</sup> He also watched the famous television program known as *Let Poland Be Poland* at the White House with his team. In this ninety-minute program, a compilation of world leaders and celebrities expressed their solidarity with Poland. Reagan and Margaret Thatcher made an appearance, along with politicians such as Japanese Prime Minister Zenko Suzuki and Italian Prime Minister Giovanni Spadolini. Actors Kirk Douglas and Henry Fonda also showed their support, and Frank Sinatra concluded the program by singing a Polish folk song “Ever Homeward” in the Polish language. *Let Poland Be Poland* was broadcasted in fifty different countries, but unfortunately was banned in the country that the program was inspired by.<sup>408</sup>

Reagan was also quick to show his support for the Poles after the imposition of martial law in Poland on December 13<sup>th</sup>, 1981. As mentioned, during his Christmas speech on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1981, he requested that the American people show their solidarity with Poland by lighting candles and placing them on their windowsills. Poles followed suit and began placing candles in their windows on the 13<sup>th</sup> of each month in remembrance of the imposition of martial law. Poles also publicly showed their resistance by laying flowers in the shape of a cross in front of monuments and churches, and even painted anti-regime slogans throughout the streets and walls of the city. Although these were seemingly small acts, their visibility made a difference.

Shortly after Reagan’s holiday speech on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1982, the president announced that January 30<sup>th</sup> would be declared “Solidarity Day” and encouraged Americans to show their support for the Poles on this day. Later that year, on October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1982, Reagan once again addressed the nation with a [speech](#) that supported the Solidarity Movement, encouraging the brave Polish people, addressing the brutality of Jaruzelski’s regime, and listing actions the United States would take in retaliation against the communist government for their cruelty. Reagan announced he would willingly remove these restrictions and offer economic assistance “once Warsaw decides to restore to the Polish people their human rights.”<sup>409</sup> He also urged the regime to remove martial law and release Lech Wałęsa, along with the other activists from prison. Reagan concluded the speech with the title of the famous program, “Let Poland Be Poland.” He once again used this line to conclude his speech to a crowd of Polish Americans in Chicago on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1983. He visited Chicago, the city with the highest diaspora of Poles in America, in order to once again defend the Polish people and encourage social justice. He spoke

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<sup>407</sup> Jones, 158.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>409</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Radio Address to the Nation on Solidarity and United States Relations with Poland,” Radio Address to the Nation on Solidarity and United States Relations With Poland | The American Presidency Project, October 9, 1982, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/radio-address-the-nation-solidarity-and-united-states-relations-with-poland>.



of the pope's recent pilgrimage: "I was deeply moved, as I know you were, by the pope's outspoken defense of the Polish people's human rights." Reagan also vouched US support to Poland: "The United States will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the Polish people."<sup>410</sup> It is evident that Reagan prioritized keeping a genuine relationship with the Polish communities both in America and overseas in Poland.

These public displays of support and cultural promotion of Poland promoted the message of "you are not alone," not only to Poland, but all the countries living in the Soviet sphere. The Soviet government thrived by atomizing society and instilling fear. Reagan's administration changed that and delivered the same message as John Paul II: "Be not afraid," and remember that the West is with you to win this battle. Above all, the communist regime had an internal security problem, namely the fear of their own people. Reagan's words, political strategy, economic actions, and public diplomacy gave courage to people, and mobilized them into resistance and action. Citizens were no longer going to censor themselves, and they knew they had the support of two great world leaders, Ronald Reagan and John Paul II.

### **A Successful Nonviolent, Peaceful Opposition**

Through these overt and covert efforts, Reagan and his team were able to abide by John Paul II's message of "fighting evil with good." The Cold War was ultimately an ideological battle between democratic and totalitarian values. Reagan knew he could join forces with the Vatican because the church was on the side of the people and freedom. In fact, Poland's fight for freedom in the 20<sup>th</sup> century cannot be told without recognizing the role of the Polish Catholic Church and the political and moral support it provided. Reagan saw the power that the Church had in society and among the people. For this reason, among others, he believed that the pope would be the key to taking down the Soviet Union, and thus began the partnership with the Vatican.

Without the combined efforts of Reagan and John Paul II to fight communism on both the political and moral planes, the reign of communism in Poland could have lasted decades more, ended in a bloody revolution, or perhaps, what is worse, never happened at all. John Paul II provided words of hope and was the spiritual leader of Poland. He was peaceful yet assertive. Reagan, on the other hand, had the political power to organize covert action, impose economic sanctions, and steer the world stage. The president was described by his former speechwriter, Clark Judge, as "tough with a smile."<sup>411</sup> For Reagan, the Cold War strategy of "We win, they lose" was the only option. Above all, both figures were moral witnesses to the crimes of communism and did not censor themselves. Furthermore, these knights of liberty found it critical to develop a connection with people living in the Soviet Empire, and continuously reminded

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<sup>410</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Remarks to Polish Americans in Chicago, Illinois," National Archives, June 23, 1983, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/remarks-polish-americans-chicago-illinois>.

<sup>411</sup> Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, "Knights of Liberty: Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Saint John Paul II, and President Ronald Reagan," video, 6:41:57, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFtLFuwFJ\\_Y&t=18161s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFtLFuwFJ_Y&t=18161s).

them to be not afraid. Through their encouraging words and actions, they mobilized the people of the Eastern Bloc, who then successfully defeated communism largely through nonviolent means.

Looking back at history, it is clear that figures such as John Paul II and Ronald Reagan were divinely placed in their leadership positions for a specific purpose. As once stated by John Paul II, “In the designs of Providence, there are no mere coincidences.” Due to their joint commitment and the allyship between the Vatican and the U.S., the innocent people living under the Evil Empire were finally released from the grips of communism by 1991. Nevertheless, even if communism was “officially” gone, this political ideology and social system continued to exist within the Central and Eastern bloc, albeit in a different form. Communism lingered in the institutions, judicial system, economic system, and even the mentality of people. The years of 1989 and 1991 were not a simple switch that automatically “freed” the Central, Eastern Bloc. True freedom was a gradual transition that took over a decade, and many states in the Central and Eastern European region did not see a significant difference until they joined the European Union. In fact, one can see that the errors of Russia never fully went away. The characteristics of communist tyranny and oppression are still present in Russia today and have manifested into the war in Ukraine.

## Part 2: History Repeats Itself

### **Chapter 5: A Case Study on the War in Ukraine: Russian Totalitarianism Continues**

*Not even an increase in Russian casualties, recorded murders, or Western sanctions could persuade the Russian politicians or Russian people to oppose this war. Denialism, silence, and compliance is how the Russian people chose to respond to the atrocities happening in Ukraine. True, the population is controlled and manipulated; however, there still hasn't been significant public pushback from the Russian people to demonstrate opposition. In fact, many Russians today continue to view Joseph Stalin in a positive light, and there is even a "growing nostalgia for the Soviet period" across all age groups.<sup>412</sup> Aspects of Russian totalitarianism thrive today because the same Russian imperialist mentality witnessed during the Soviet period reigns among the current population. The horrible, inhumane murders and tortures currently witnessed throughout Ukraine are reminiscent of Stalin's Red Terror. Today's war crimes prove that Russia does not believe in the statehood of Ukraine or in the identity of the Ukrainian people. The same belief is applicable to all countries that were once part of the Russian empire and the former Soviet sphere. This chapter will explore why the Russian mentality is the way it is, as well as the current genocide being committed against Ukrainians, the message of John Paul II's 2001 pilgrimage to Ukraine, and what the response of the West should be moving forward.*

#### **The Mentality of Russians**

The Muscovite imperialist mentality that began with the Tsars and was passed on to the Soviets continues to be embedded in the Russian mindset today. As stated by President Carter's national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Russia can be either an empire or a democracy, but it cannot be both...Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be an empire, but with Ukraine suborned and then subordinated, Russia automatically becomes an empire."<sup>413</sup> This mindset that Ukraine's territory is necessary to complete the desired Russian empire is evident both among Russian politicians and the Russian people. Although it is difficult to gauge an exact percentage of how many Russians support the war, all polls conducted to date suggest that a majority of citizens support the "special military operation." Propaganda runs deep in the country, and independent news sources are banned. Even sharing an opinion opposite of the government can get a person fired, kicked out of university, or even worse, receive up to a 15-year prison sentence or a \$45,000 fine.<sup>414</sup> These penalties can be incurred simply by joining an anti-war

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<sup>412</sup> "Joseph Stalin: Why so Many Russians like the Soviet Dictator," BBC News, April 18, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-47975704>.

<sup>413</sup> Michael Averko, "Same Roots Nourish Russia and Ukraine," *The New York Times*, June 28, 1994, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/06/28/opinion/1-same-roots-nourish-russia-and-ukraine-521140.html>.

<sup>414</sup> David Gilbert, "Russia Can Now Jail People for 15 Years for Tweeting about the War on Ukraine," *VICE*, March 4, 2022, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/xgdmdn/russian-law-fifteen-years-jail-tweeting-ukraine-war>.

protest, holding up a blank poster in public, or posting a simple tweet about the war which the government deems fake. Russia has successfully terrorized its people into conformity.

Furthermore, support for the Russian president continues to hover at around 80%-- although about half of the respondents who stated they support Putin do not share positive attitudes toward a second mobilization.<sup>415</sup> Still, the first mobilization that took place in September was not exactly met with resistance. Unfortunately, Putin will continue sending his soldiers to the meat grinder, as he has no incentive to stop this war. He will not negotiate until he is put into a position where he must negotiate. If he dies, another leader with the same Muscovite mentality will restart the war.

Above all, Putin will not react to more sanctions, dead soldiers, nor pressure from the West, but only to a Ukrainian victory where he is completely and utterly humiliated. The only acceptable outcome is the restoration of Ukraine's borders and continuing to respect Ukraine's "international borders, statehood, and democracy."<sup>416</sup> The belief that Ukraine is not a sovereign country and lacks statehood is Russia's justification for attacking. Further, the belief that there is no place for Ukraine on the map is paired equally with the belief that there is no place for its people nor for a "distinct Ukrainian nation or identity."<sup>417</sup> Russia's nationalist ideology justifies murdering, torturing, abducting, and raping Ukrainians because "a total enemy should not just be defeated but erased from existence."<sup>418</sup> Russia is not only conducting a war but a genocide.

## Genocide Against Ukrainians

The horrendous actions and murders being committed against the Ukrainian people today are "comparable to Stalin's Red Terror when millions of innocent people were killed for being 'class enemies.'<sup>419</sup> Russian soldiers pay no attention to the rules of war imposed by the Geneva Convention, the Rome Statute, and various other international agreements that Russia happens to be a part of. The rules set out in international laws and treaties first and foremost protect civilians and the infrastructure required for their survival. Despite this, an estimated 10,200 civilians, or unarmed individuals, have been killed according to January 2024 estimates. Further, 520 of these victims were children. A total of 19,300 civilians have been injured, 167,200 civilian buildings are destroyed, and 123,685 war crimes are currently registered.<sup>420</sup> This genocide of the Ukrainian people and the Ukrainian culture/identity can be precisely witnessed in the following war crimes:

- An estimated 458 civilians were killed in the April 2022 Bucha massacre. Most of the victims were found with [fatal gunshot wounds](#). Further, many bodies were found with

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<sup>415</sup> Maria Domanska, "Putin's Neo-Totalitarian Project: The Current Political Situation in Russia," OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, February 23, 2023, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2023-02-17/putins-neo-totalitarian-project-current-political-situation>.

<sup>416</sup> Frans Timmermans, "Totalitarianism Has Returned to Europe. It Must Be Defeated.," *The Moscow Times*, February 21, 2023, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/02/21/totalitarianism-has-returned-to-europe-it-must-be-defeated-a80293>.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

<sup>420</sup> Official Website of Ukraine, Russia's War Crimes, 2023, <https://war.ukraine.ua/russia-war-crimes/>.

signs of torture, including burns, bruises, and lacerations. Ukrainian investigators found evidence of victims being “tied to the bedspring and interrogated; strapped to the plank and waterboarded.”<sup>421</sup>

- Around 600 Ukrainians died after Russia bombed the Donetsk Academic Regional Drama Theater in Mariupol.<sup>422</sup> Civilians died inside and around the building. Satellite images showcased the word “DETI” or “CHILDREN” painted in white, both in the front and back of the building, in order to signal to warplanes that families were sheltering inside.
- A massive airstrike was conducted upon a maternity and children’s hospital in Mariupol on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Russia still continues to strike repeatedly at medical facilities, shelters, and hospitals today. This specific airstrike in Mariupol came after Russia “agreed” to stop attacking for 12 hours so refugees could evacuate towns and cities. Russian soldiers did not abide by the agreement, as they blocked roads and shot at escaping citizens. They even cut off water and electricity to hold people hostage inside the city.
- Of the 436 bodies found in the Izium, Kharkiv region, 30 bodies evidenced signs of torture. A great majority of these victims were civilians and “showed signs of a violent death.”<sup>423</sup> Oleh Syniehubov, the head of the military administration in Kharkiv, stated that “There are bodies with a rope around the neck, with hands tied, with broken limbs and with gunshot wounds. Several men had their genitals amputated.”<sup>424</sup>
- As many as 14,000 Ukrainian children from Russian-occupied areas have been deported to Russia for forced adoptions.<sup>425</sup> According to the UN Refugee Agency, even if children become displaced, they cannot receive another nationality or become adopted by another family until there is absolute proof that the children have no family or guardianship. Furthermore, Russia’s federal government “has systematically relocated at least 6,000 children from Ukraine” into pro-Russian re-education camps where children learn Russia-centric views and cannot return to their

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<sup>421</sup> Simon Shuster, “The Crime Scene Left behind at a Summer Camp in Bucha,” Time, April 14, 2022, <https://time.com/6166681/bucha-massacre-ukraine-dispatch/>.

<sup>422</sup> Lori Hinnant, Mstyslav Chernov, and Vasilisa Stepanenko, “‘They Thought They Were Safe.’ AP Investigation Reveals 600 Likely Died in Mariupol Theater Airstrike,” PBS, May 4, 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/they-thought-they-were-safe-ap-investigation-reveals-600-likely-died-in-mariupol-theater-airstrike>.

<sup>423</sup> Yulia Kesaieva, Jennifer Hauser, and Kathleen Magramo, “Signs of Torture, Mutilation on Bodies at Izium Mass Burial Site: Ukraine Officials,” CNN, September 24, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/23/europe/ukraine-izium-mass-burial-bodies-recovered-torture-intl-hnk/index.html>.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> Jacob Geanous, “UN Condemns Russia for Forcing Ukrainian Children into Adoption,” New York Post, January 28, 2023, <https://nypost.com/2023/01/28/un-slams-russia-for-forcing-ukrainian-children-into-adoption/>.

parents.<sup>426</sup> The ages of these children range from as young as 4 months old to 17 years.

- So far, damage has been inflicted on an estimated 1,595 cultural heritage sites, out of 28,618 total. The most damage is seen among memorials/monuments (691), places of worship and burial (508), museums (126), libraries/archives (109), and heritage buildings (100), with archeological sites (18) and performance centers (10) following last. This lists the potential damage inflicted between February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, and January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023. This recorded number will increase soon, as flooding from the destruction of the Nova Kakhova Dam on June 6<sup>th</sup> has affected multiple cultural heritage sites.

As stated by the official website of Ukraine documenting these various war crimes, “All these criminal acts have no military purpose.”<sup>427</sup> This list is only a glance into the thousands of atrocities Russia has caused and will continue to cause. Russian soldiers are attempting to erase the Ukrainian identity, and continue targeting innocent, unarmed people simply for the fact that they are Ukrainian. Western organizations and Ukraine must continue exposing and documenting these countless, inhumane war crimes. However, the pathways to prosecution are limited, as the International Criminal Court (ICC) cannot arrest suspects, and also because “Russia is not a signatory to the agreement which set up the court.”<sup>428</sup> This means that Russian leaders and politicians such as Putin couldn’t be prosecuted; however, the ICC in Hague has still issued a warrant for the Russian president’s arrest. In addition, Ukraine’s prosecutor general has already charged 135 suspects, and the courts are currently investigating around 26,000 suspected war-crime cases.<sup>429</sup> All perpetrators must be held accountable, and justice will be served for every Ukrainian who was brutally murdered or who is still currently suffering. Russia cannot and will not go unpunished. Above all, it is important to recall that Ukraine is not only fighting for its country and its people, but for all of Europe, and ultimately for the whole world. As once said by Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz, “A free Ukraine is needed for Europe, and the world.”<sup>430</sup>

### **John Paul II’s 2001 Pilgrimage to Ukraine**

John Paul II’s message of proclaiming the truth and dignity of man continued into Ukraine when the pope visited in 2001, from the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June to the 27<sup>th</sup> of June. During the 5-day pilgrimage, he reminded Ukrainians of their dignity and value as persons created in *imago Dei*, God’s own image and likeness. It was critical to do so, as he recognized all the hardships

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<sup>426</sup> “Russia’s Systematic Program for the Re-Education and Adoption of Ukraine’s Children,” Conflict Observatory, February 14, 2023, <https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/apps/sites/#/home/pages/children-camps-1>.

<sup>427</sup> Official Website of Ukraine, Russia’s War Crimes, 2023, <https://war.ukraine.ua/russia-war-crimes/>.

<sup>428</sup> “Ukraine Conflict: What War Crimes Is Russia Accused Of?,” BBC News, March 17, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60690688>.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid.

<sup>430</sup> Carl Anderson, “Liberating a Continent: John Paul II and the Fall of Communism,” video, 1:33:22, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7dHzSFIR\\_o&t=1503s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7dHzSFIR_o&t=1503s).

degrading the human person that Ukrainians, like the Poles, had faced after decades of enduring the Nazi and Soviet regimes. Despite famine, oppression, death, and, most recently at the time, Chornobyl, John Paul II came to send a message of hope. He reminded them of the values Ukrainians proudly stood for, as well as their bravery. He reaffirmed their Christian and national identity, and proclaimed that it was, in fact, the Ukrainians, and not the Russians, who were leading the “dialog between Catholics and the Orthodox church.”<sup>431</sup> Furthermore, the Pope showed his respect by speaking Ukrainian during his visit, quoting their national poets in his sermons, and encouraging Ukrainians to no longer feel constrained by old Soviet ways. It is sad to acknowledge that the words John Paul II spoke during his five-day pilgrimage to Ukraine in 2001 still ring true today:

Thank you, Ukraine, who defended Europe in your untiring and heroic struggle against invaders. [...] Even if you still feel the painful scars of the tremendous wounds inflicted over endless years of oppression, dictatorship and totalitarianism, during which the rights of the people were denied and trampled upon, look with confidence to the future. This is the opportune time! This is the time for hope and daring! My hope is that Ukraine will be able fully to become a part of the Europe which will take in the entire continent from the Atlantic to the Urals. As I said at the end of that year 1989 which was of such great importance in the recent history of the continent, there cannot be “a peaceful Europe capable of spreading civilization without the interaction and sharing of the different though complementary values” which are characteristic of the peoples of East and West.

To you, land of Ukraine, I renew my wish for prosperity and peace. You have left unforgettable memories in my heart! Goodbye, friendly people, whom I embrace with sympathy and affection! Thank you for your heartfelt welcome and hospitality, which I shall never forget!<sup>432</sup>

It seems to be that the Pope felt great sympathy towards Ukraine because he himself lived through two totalitarian regimes and further recognized that Poland and Ukraine’s history is very much intertwined. He saw the hardships of Poland reflected also in Ukraine. However, Ukraine obviously is much more influenced by Russia, and vulnerable to the atrocities of Russia, due to their common history (Russian empire and later part of Soviet Union), cultural similarities, and geographical location. During John Paul II’s visit, his goal was to remind Ukrainians that Ukraine is ultimately a part of Europe, and that they have a clear European orientation. John Paul II states this in the first speech of his trip upon landing at the Kyiv airport:

Ukraine has a clearly European vocation, emphasized also by the Christian roots of your culture. My hope is that these roots will strengthen your national unity, bringing the life-blood of authentic and shared values to the reforms now underway. May this land continue in its noble mission, with the pride expressed by the poet just quoted [Taras Shevchenko] when

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<sup>431</sup> Grzegorz Adamczyk, “Pope John Paul II’s Message to Ukrainians Remains Relevant to This Day,” Remix News, April 19, 2022, <https://rmx.news/poland/pope-john-paul-iis-message-to-ukrainians-remains-relevant-to-this-day/>.

<sup>432</sup> John Paul II, “Pastoral Visit to the Ukraine: Farewell Ceremony – International Airport, Lviv,” The Holy See, June 27, 2001, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/june/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20010627\\_ucraina-departure.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20010627_ucraina-departure.html).

he wrote: “Nowhere in the world is there another Ukraine, nowhere is there another Dnieper.” You who live in this Land, do not forget this!<sup>433</sup>

### **The United States Cannot be Isolationist**

If John Paul II were alive today, it is safe to assume that he would continue to defend the same ideals as he did in 2001, probably with more urgency now than ever before. The West must continue to support Ukraine militarily and politically. Russia's actions have proved it has no limits on how far it will go. They are trying to terrorize Ukraine into submission and wear down the support coming from the West. The future of this war and how it will end will depend significantly on the response of Europe and the United States. Without continued funding and weaponry, Ukraine risks defeat. We recall the words of President Reagan: “We in America have learned bitter lessons from two world wars: It is better to be here [in Europe] ready to protect the peace, than to take blind shelter across the sea, rushing to respond only after freedom is lost. We’ve learned that isolationism never was and never will be an acceptable response to tyrannical governments with an expansionist intent.”<sup>434</sup>

The West cannot give into the propaganda war, which is also being played out, that often portrays Ukraine as exploiting the American taxpayer. Understandably, the United States has its own domestic problems that have not been addressed; however, the success or failure of Ukrainian forces determines if the United States will eventually have to send its own soldiers to fight. The cost of the United States joining the war would be significantly more expensive in potential lives lost and money spent. It must be emphasized that Russia will not stop if it conquers Ukraine but will continue on to Moldova, Georgia, the Baltics, Poland, and beyond. This imperialist, Muscovite mindset will continue even if Putin dies or is eventually removed. The world must do everything it can today to protect Ukraine and defeat Russia, in order to avoid war with a NATO country in the future.

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<sup>433</sup> John Paul II, “Pastoral Visit to the Ukraine: Welcome Ceremony – Boryspil International Airport, Kyiv” The Holy See, June 23, 2001, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/june/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20010623\\_ucraina-arrival.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20010623_ucraina-arrival.html).

<sup>434</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at a Ceremony Commemorating the 40th Anniversary of the Normandy Invasion, D-Day,” National Archives, June 6, 1984, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/remarks-ceremony-commemorating-40th-anniversary-normandy-invasion-d-day>.



## Chapter 6: A Case Study on China: A Country Still Battling Religious Freedom

*The Chinese Communist Party is determined to dominate any religious group that could challenge the authority of their party. It is critical for the Chinese authorities to control every aspect of a person's life, from the mental and physical to the moral and spiritual. As a result, the atheist dictatorship has allowed its citizens to practice only religions that are on the approved list of the CCP. This includes five faiths: "Buddhism, Catholicism, Daoism, Islam, and Protestantism. Authorities tightly monitor registered and unregistered groups."<sup>435</sup> However, the registered religions cannot practice freely; they must abide by the guidelines provided by the CCP. This means preaching CCP ideology and accepting the CCP values, a direct conflict with all faiths. President Xi Jinping has pushed for the Sinicization of all religions, to adapt them to the values and traditions of the majority Han Chinese population.<sup>436</sup> This is all so that religion should not become a vessel that would undermine loyalty to the regime. The strong opposition that the Church in Poland maintained against the communist government did not occur very long ago, and its example remains fresh in the minds of the Chinese elite.<sup>437</sup> Ultimately, religious freedom should be seen as an individually held right that cannot be granted or taken away by the State. This chapter will explain how the CCP is controlling various faiths and how it has dismantled religious freedom in the process.*

### Religion is Only a Political Tool

Atheism in China begins at the highest ranks. Every member of the Chinese Communist Party, along with those enlisted in the armed forces, is required to be an atheist. Even Communist Party family members are strongly discouraged from having a religious affiliation and involving themselves in any public religious ceremonies. Religion is a threat to the regime, and those who belong to the CCP must be free from any outside influence. Furthermore, there are only five officially approved CCP religions. These faiths are instructed to only practice "normal religious activities"; however, "normal" is purposely left undefined and therefore "can be broadly interpreted."<sup>438</sup> All approved CCP religions (Buddhism, Taoism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam) are subject to the supervision of both the CCP's United Front Work Department (UFD) and the Chinese State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) after they register under one of the seven state-controlled national religious organizations. These seven patriotic religious associations include: "the Buddhist Association of China (BAC), the Chinese Taoist Association (CTA), the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) and Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China (BCCCC), the Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and China Christian Council (CCC), and the Islamic Association of

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<sup>435</sup> Eleanor Albert and Lindsay Maizland, "The State of Religion in China," Council on Foreign Relations, September 25, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/background/reigion-china>.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

<sup>437</sup> "Religious Repression in China," Human Rights Watch, June 1998, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/campaigns/china-98/religion.htm>.

<sup>438</sup> Albert and Maizland, op. cit.

China (IAC).”<sup>439</sup> The bylaws of these religious organizations declare that their purpose is to “unite and guide” members of their respective religious communities [in order] to “support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the socialist system.”<sup>440</sup>

These seven state-controlled organizations, along with the government and CCP, monitor every detail of each recognized religion, including “membership in religious organizations, locations of meetings, religious training, selection of clergy, publication of religious materials, and funding for religious activities.”<sup>441</sup> Independent groups who have refused to join one of the seven religious associations, such as underground Catholics, Protestant house churches, Tibetan Buddhists, Uyghurs, and other Muslims, are especially targeted by authorities and are vulnerable to harassment, fines, and persecution. Above all, religion is not tolerated so that the Chinese people can practice their faith, but rather because these religious groups serve as a political tool for the regime. During the 2021 National Religious Work Conference, Xi Jinping emphasized that state-controlled religious groups are meant to “promote patriotism” and to “continuously enhance [their] identification with the great motherland, the Chinese nation, the Chinese Communist Party, and [Chinese socialism].”<sup>442</sup> Religious groups must demonstrate their loyalty to the CCP first, and only secondly to God. These groups are not meant to be true cohorts of faith, but rather only “patriotic religious organizations” that are subjected to the constant supervision and infiltration of CCP ideology.<sup>443</sup> Examples of religions having to conform to CCP ideology and values are plentiful:

- Many places of worship are “forced to display Communist propaganda posters, including images and quotes of Communist leaders such as Xi Jinping and Mao Zedong.”<sup>444</sup>
- Churches must have their attendees sing the national anthem before they can sing any Christian songs or hymns.
- Faith leaders are directed on what to say during their worship services, often devotions to CCP principles are included in sermons.
- The words Christ, Jesus, Bible, and Christianity are censored from social media posts.
- There are restrictions on the printing and distribution of all religious texts (Bible, Koran, etc.).
- Religious structures (temples, churches, shrines) cannot be built without authorization, and the government can also demolish existing religious buildings if they deem there are too many.
- Surveillance cameras are installed in classrooms conducting religious teachings.

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<sup>439</sup> Mingzhi Chen, “Religious Freedom in China,” United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, December 2022, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2022-12/2022%20Factsheet%20-%20China%20State-Controlled%20Religion.pdf>.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid.

<sup>441</sup> “Religious Repression in China,” *supra*.

<sup>442</sup> Chen, *op. cit.*

<sup>443</sup> Ibid.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid.

- Restrictions are placed on religious schooling, as well as the times and locations of religious celebrations.
- Any religious donations that exceed 100,000 yuan must be reported.
- Foreigners who visit a Chinese church or worship service must register first and then go through a passport check. Chinese citizens cannot attend these same services. Rewards up to \$15,300 are given to citizens who report “tips on foreigners who engaged in religious activities without permission.”<sup>445</sup>

All of these examples prove that every religion in China is under constant Sinicization. The recently released “Five-Year Sinicization Work Plans” reveal that there will be efforts “to Sinicize the interpretation of religious doctrines, sermons, rituals, and architectural styles of places of worship in order to conform to the CCP’s ideological and policy requirements.”<sup>446</sup> In accordance with the plan, clergy members of all faiths were already required to “attend political-indoctrination exercises organized by the CCP” and were informed that their worship services would be under strict surveillance.<sup>447</sup> It should be noted that Christianity, Islam, and Tibetan Buddhism are more strongly subject to Sinicization because they are regarded as having a stronger foreign influence and thus more subversive. Examples of this targeting include the “altering, censoring, and controlling the content of Christian, Islamic, and Tibetan Buddhist religious texts (such as the Bible and the Koran), doctrines, sermons, and hymns to ensure their alignment with the CCP’s interpretation of religion, policy, and political objectives.”<sup>448</sup> In addition to this, the government has promoted demolishing, removing, and modifying “places of worship (such as mosques, churches, and temples) and architectural styles and religious symbols (such as crosses and mosque domes) deemed too foreign or insufficiently Sinicized.”<sup>449</sup> Religious leaders and attendees who show any resistance or refusal to abide by these various measures can face persecution, repression, arrest, or even death and torture.

## Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism

According to Barbara Demick, a journalist and former Beijing bureau chief for the *Los Angeles Times*, religions such as Buddhism and Daoism are more widely tolerated than Islam or Christianity because they are “the most authentically Chinese religions.”<sup>450</sup> Ian John, author of *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion After Mao*, confirms this and reports that “hundreds, if not thousands, of folk religious temples are unregistered with the SARA but are tolerated.”<sup>451</sup> Apparently, Chinese Buddhism was even “passively supported”

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<sup>445</sup> Jianli Yang, “Religious Freedom Is Dying in China,” *National Review*, July 14, 2021, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2021/07/religious-freedom-is-dying-in-china/>.

<sup>446</sup> Chen, op. cit.

<sup>447</sup> Yang, op. cit.

<sup>448</sup> Chen, op. cit.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> Albert and Maizland, op. cit.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid.

at one point because it was believed to “help bolster the image of China’s peaceful rise.”<sup>452</sup> However, this is only true of Chinese Buddhism, not Tibetan Buddhism. As Tibetan Buddhism is regarded as a “foreign religion,” Tibetan Buddhists and nuns face high levels of persecution. In addition, there are quotas in place to restrict the number of practicing monks and nuns.

The Chinese authorities are especially hostile toward the Dalai Lama and have reportedly beaten, tortured, and detained monks and nuns who would not denounce him or who possessed his portrait. The BAC (Buddhist Association of China) is also involved in “the reincarnation or selection process” of both the Dalai Lama and future Tibetan Buddhist leaders.<sup>453</sup> The CCP believes they should hold the ultimate authority in appointing the Dalai Lama’s successor. They further assert that if the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama is not State-appointed, then he will not be officially recognized. In the end, there will likely be two Dalai Lamas, the “real” one and the CCP figure. The authorities have already demonstrated their force in the past when they “replaced” Gedhun Choekyi Nyima—the 11th Penchen Lama, recognized in 1995 by the Dalai Lama—with the CCP’s choice, Gyalsten Norbu.<sup>454</sup> Furthermore, in order to advance the Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism, seminars were conducted to “indoctrinate monks and nuns at Tibetan Buddhist monasteries.”<sup>455</sup> In addition to this, authorities hope to stop the communication and teachings between teachers of the faith and students. Authorities have also destroyed Buddhist religious symbols, statues, sites, and relics, as well as “restricted Tibetans’ access to temples with a heavy security presence.”<sup>456</sup> The BAC and the CCP will continue to impose restrictions and attempt to erase the culture and religion of the Tibetans.

## **Protestants and Catholics**

Current estimates hold that the Christian population in China totals around 100 million people. Protestants make up the majority of this figure, as Catholics only account for 10-12 million Christians.<sup>457</sup> In 30 years’ time, the number of Christians is expected to reach around 400 million.<sup>458</sup> Ironically, this projection would make China the most Christian nation in the whole world. In accordance with this upward trend, Protestantism is reportedly the fastest-growing religious group in all of China. The direction of the future Church is heading underground, however, with “unregistered churchgoers outnumbering members of official churches nearly two to one.”<sup>459</sup> This should be no surprise, since authorities continue to detain Christians, raid churches, remove Bibles from churches, demolish and/or damage church buildings, and confiscate religious materials.

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<sup>452</sup> Ibid.

<sup>453</sup> Chen, op. cit.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

<sup>455</sup> USCIRF Annual Report 2022, “USCIRF -- Recommended For Countries of Particular Concern (CPC),” USCIRF.gov, December 2022, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2022-04/2022%20China.pdf>.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid.

<sup>457</sup> Albert and Maizland, op. cit.

<sup>458</sup> “Christianity in China,” video, 4:01, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SuLgn1K0MiI>.

<sup>459</sup> Albert and Maizland, op. cit.

In addition to this, pastors and priests continuously face arrest and harassment. Some examples include the imprisonment of one of China's leading Christian voices, Pastor Wang Yi, who was given a nine-year prison sentence, as well as the arrests of both "Elder Zhang Chunlei of Ren'ai Reformed Church and Pastor Yang Hua of Living Stone Church in Guiyang City, Guizhou Province."<sup>460</sup> On the Catholic side, Vatican-approved Bishop Joseph Zhang Weizhu was arrested last year for his refusal to join the Patriotic Catholic Church, while Cardinal Joseph Zen and five others were found guilty of "failing to register a fund that helped pay for the legal fees and medical treatments of Hong Kong pro-democracy protesters."<sup>461</sup> The Vatican continues to have no official diplomatic ties with China and has remained silent on the arrests. The Vatican recognizes Taiwan as independent, and there is still tension regarding the bishop appointment process. Regardless of how relations develop in the future, those priests and pastors who remain in the public eye are under constant surveillance. As no amount of appeasement can improve the stance on religious freedom, the number of underground churches will only continue to grow.

## **Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang and Tibet**

Although all faiths in China are targeted, Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang have suffered the highest levels of repression. The estimated 11 million Uyghurs, a majority Muslim, Turkic-speaking ethnic group living in the northwestern region of Xinjiang, have a State mandate declared against them: "break their lineage, break their roots."<sup>462</sup> Since 2017, over a million "Uyghurs and other Muslims, including ethnic Kazakhs and Uzbeks, have been detained."<sup>463</sup> They are sent to what the Chinese government refers to as "vocational education and training centers."<sup>464</sup> In reality, the conditions of these facilities prove they should be recognized and properly described as concentration camps. Tursunay Ziyawudun, a survivor of the camps, described the harsh conditions she endured on *CBN News*. Ziyawundun stated that her cell was only "four square meters and there were more than 20 people. There was only one bucket to be used as a toilet. At night they would take out some people, especially some young girls, for interrogation. We could hear their screaming, some of the girls would bleed very badly, one woman had bite marks all over her body, and sometimes they would die because of the bleeding."<sup>465</sup> Tursunay furthered shared that she was gang raped by the prison guards and tortured by electric shocks.

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<sup>460</sup> USCIRF Annual Report 2022.

<sup>461</sup> Courtney Mares, "Cardinal Zen Appeals Conviction in Hong Kong Court," Catholic News Agency, December 14, 2022, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/253073/cardinal-zen-appeals-conviction-in-hong-kong-court>.

<sup>462</sup> Beth Van Schaack, Leah Kaplan, and Maya Wang, "'Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots,'" Human Rights Watch, April 19, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/19/break-their-lineage-break-their-roots/chinas-crimes-against-humanity-targeting>.

<sup>463</sup> Lindsay Maizland, "China's Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang," Council on Foreign Relations, September 22, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights>.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid.

<sup>465</sup> Christian World News, "China's War on Faith," video, 21:42, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=imGyWzlb34k&t=413s>.

This disregard for human dignity is felt by all Uyghurs in the camps. They are subject to forced labor, sterilization, and organ harvesting. Tursunay explained how upon entry into the camp, “every prisoner is subjected to an organ examination.”<sup>466</sup> She shares how she witnessed some prisoners put on a bus and taken away after the examination. Research by the China Studies team at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation shows evidence that from a dataset of 124,770 Chinese-language transplant publications, 71 reports show “that brain death could not have properly been declared.”<sup>467</sup> This means that at least 71 prisoners, if not more, ultimately died from the removal of their hearts. The findings of this report “strongly suggest that physicians in the People's Republic of China have participated in executions by organ removal.”<sup>468</sup> Those Uyghurs who are not executed in the camps undergo systematic brainwashing, and they cannot be released from the camp until there is evidence of their “transformation.” During imprisonment, studying remedial Mandarin must be their top priority, and all traces of their native language, beliefs, and behaviors must be erased. Prisoners must also undergo strict “discipline requirements for getting up, roll call, washing, going to the toilet, organizing and housekeeping, eating, studying, sleeping, closing the door and so forth.”<sup>469</sup>

Uyghurs are forced into these camps for the purposes of “re-education,” “vocational training,” and for “fighting terrorism, separatism, and extremism.”<sup>470</sup> The “crimes” that they commit which land them into these camps include: applying for a passport, acting “too religious,” having relatives in other countries, having more than 3 children, being labeled as “untrustworthy” by authorities, or anything else that might be a cause for concern to the CCP.<sup>471</sup> Those Uyghurs who are not detained in camps must live a life of constant surveillance. For example, there is a police station located every 50 yards in major cities, cameras on every street corner, and facial recognition everywhere. QR codes are placed outside of Uyghur homes that, when scanned, reveal all the personal information of the inhabitants of the home. Uyghurs also cannot enjoy privacy in their own homes, as the CCP has implemented a program known as “pair up and become family.” The rules of this program require random Chinese people to move into the homes of Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities for weeks at a time to monitor their behavior and ultimately try to convert their ways.

In further attempts to convert Uyghurs, authorities have forced them to eat pork, drink beer, renounce their Islamic faith, and burn the Koran. In addition to these violations, young Uyghur women are forced into arranged marriages with Chinese Han men. These women cannot refuse or else they, along with everyone in their family, will be sent to a concentration camp. These cruel initiatives are occurring in order to control, and dramatically decrease, the population of Uyghurs and ethnic minorities. An estimated 1-2

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<sup>466</sup> Ibid.

<sup>467</sup> Matthew P. Robertson and Jacob Lavee, “Execution by Organ Procurement: Breaching the Dead Donor Rule in China,” *American Journal of Transplantation* 22, no. 7 (April 4, 2022): 1804–12, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajt.16969>.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid.

<sup>469</sup> BBC News, “Data Leak Reveals How China ‘Brainwashes’ Uighurs in Prison Camps,” BBC News, November 24, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-50511063>.

<sup>470</sup> “China’s War on Faith,” video, *supra*.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid.

million Uyghurs continue to live under these grueling conditions today, and their imprisonment has been referred to as “the largest incarceration of an ethnoreligious minority since the Holocaust.”<sup>472</sup> Although some efforts have been made to hold the CCP accountable, the victims of Chinese repression continue to feel forgotten by the world.

## **How to Support the Chinese People and Their Battle?**

It is not enough to publicly declare that China is committing genocide and document the violations of these human rights. As last year’s UN report regarding the Chinese treatment of Uyghurs excluded the word “genocide,” one can see just how effective the leading human rights organization is in taking action. Nor have Western sanctions proven to be effective. It also does not help that China’s allies and majority-Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have not responded to the genocide. In fact, in June of 2022, “Sixty countries signed a statement calling for the UN human rights chief to respect that Xinjiang-related issues are ‘China’s internal affairs’ and [further stated] that they ‘oppose the politicization of human rights.’”<sup>473</sup> For China’s allies and partners, it is more important to keep their economic and strategic ties on good terms.

However, similar practices of support (even if it is not direct) are witnessed here in the West as well. Companies such as IBM, Microsoft, and Oracle chose to continue working with China and fuel the CCP. If the U.S. intends to send a clear message and be as effective as possible, it is necessary to cut off *all* business deals, especially among financial institutions. Political leaders and those in Congress can write to the CEOs of big companies and explain the harmful effects of conducting business with China. The most effective method is to “disrupt the money trail” and to continue to follow the rules of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act with a high priority on banning the imports of polysilicon, cotton, and tomatoes.<sup>474</sup> The more the world can expose how China treats its own people, the easier it will be to delegitimize China on the world stage. It is the responsibility of the West and the United States to expose these atrocities and pressure companies to stop funneling money toward the communist party. Furthermore, it is an issue that deserves worldwide attention because it is not only a fight against Uyghur Muslims and Turkic minorities, but against all faiths and peoples in China. They will continue their repression and killings until an atheistic “paradise on earth” is achieved.

The Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation has released the [Xinjiang Police Files](#), which show the images of Uyghur and Turkic minorities detainees, their personal records, detainee records, camp police instructions, and other key documents. Furthermore, the [Xinjiang Person Search Tool](#) can help family, friends, and supporters search for

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<sup>472</sup> Adrain Zenz, “The Chinese Communist Party (CCP)’s Policies in Xinjiang: Overall Strategy, Central Government Involvement, and Evidence for a Systematic Attack on a Civilian Population as Well as Genocide,” House.gov, March 23, 2023, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/ZS/ZS00/20230323/115543/HHRG-118-ZS00-Wstate-ZenzA-20230323.pdf>.

<sup>473</sup> Maizland, op. cit.

<sup>474</sup> The Atlantic Council, “Religious Freedom in China Under Xi Jinping,” video, 1:14:44, July 21, 2022, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9C-975T\\_rTA&t=1242s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9C-975T_rTA&t=1242s).

information about the victims. This is a fight for human dignity, human rights, and religious freedom, the same values that John Paul II fought for during his lifetime.



## Chapter 7: Concerning Totalitarian Parallels Emerging in American Society Today

*Socialism is a word that is often thrown around in popular culture today, and as a result, it is often misused or misinterpreted in American society. The most advocated form of socialism today is known as “democratic socialism.” Progressive leaders such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Bernie Sanders are largely responsible for the rising popularity of this form of socialism today. The utopian promises of democratic socialism are attractive to young people, because it guarantees equality, free access to healthcare and education, and, most importantly, an alternative to a broken system that is no longer appealing. Capitalism is often blamed by the younger generation for the rising wage gap and overall poverty in the country. As a result, democratic socialists want to take matters into their own hands and introduce a new economic and political model that is “just” and “fair.” Yet it is worth asking if introducing socialism back into the political and economic system in any form could allow for the eventual reemergence of the final form of socialism, communism. Today’s generation is supporting an ideology without truly understanding its meaning and historical context. Misinformation and unclear intentions have the potential to spark an irreversible, permanent change in American society. This chapter will explore the rising support for “democratic” socialism, and what this emerging movement hopes to achieve. Further, this chapter will properly define the differences between state-controlled economic models and free-market models. Lastly, it will examine totalitarian tendencies emerging in American society today and consider plausible explanations for why this is the case.*

### The Support for Socialism and Communism is Growing

According to a 2018 Gallup poll, 4 out of every 10 Americans claim they would support a socialist leader in power.<sup>475</sup> Various other data sources share the same results. A 2019 January Axios poll shows that Generation Z voters, those aged 18-24, “prefer socialism (61 percent) to capitalism (41 percent). The numbers are significantly higher than the national average, of which 39 percent prefer socialism and 61 percent prefer capitalism.”<sup>476</sup> A more recent Axios poll from June of 2021 shares that young adults aged “18–34 are almost evenly split between those who view capitalism positively and those who view it negatively (49% vs. 46%). Two years ago, that margin was a gaping 20 points (58% vs. 38%).”<sup>477</sup> In addition, The Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation’s “fifth annual report on U.S. attitudes toward socialism, communism, and collectivism” taken in 2020 showed an “increased favorability of the term ‘socialism’ (49%) among Gen Z compared to 2019 (40%). Opinions of capitalism declined slightly from 2019 to 2020 among all Americans (58% to 55%), with Gen Z (ages 16-23) slightly up (49% to 52%)

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<sup>475</sup> Kengor, *The Devil and Karl Marx*, ix.

<sup>476</sup> Esha Sarai and William Gallo, “Once a Dirty Word in US Politics, Socialism Is Making a Comeback among Democrats,” VOA, February 20, 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/a/once-a-dirty-word-in-us-politics-socialism-is-making-a-comeback-among-democrats-/4795867.html>.

<sup>477</sup> Felix Salmon, “America’s Continued Move Toward Socialism,” Axios, June 25, 2021, <https://www.axios.com/2021/06/25/americas-continued-move-toward-socialism>.

and Millennials (ages 24-39) down (50% to 43%). 35% of Millennials and 31% of Gen Z support the gradual elimination of the capitalist system in favor of a more socialist system.”<sup>478</sup> Although socialism and communism are not the same political and economic systems, they evolve on the same principles. Socialism is the pre-courser and final step before communism. These polls show just how important it is to educate the population about the truths of these ideologies and the dangers of Marxism to stop its reintroduction.

### **What do people mean when they say they support socialism, and what exactly is “democratic” socialism?**

The reality is that most young adults do not know how to properly define or explain what socialism really is. Therefore, it is important to establish what people, mostly ages 18-24, mean when they say they want “socialism.” Often, they are not referring to the captive communist nations of China, Laos, North Korea, Vietnam, or Cuba, nor to the past of the Soviet Union. Rather they are thinking about socialism in terms of a system that provides more equal access, caps on interest rates, and generous welfare programs. Based on a 2014 Reason-Rupe survey where millennials were asked to describe socialism in their own words, they defined it as people who are “being kind” and “being together.”<sup>479</sup> Another millennial described socialism as a replica of the Nordic countries where “the government pays for our needs” through a liberal “government social safety net.”<sup>480</sup> This survey further found that 52% of young adult respondents have a positive view of capitalism and 42% stated they hold a favorable position on socialism; however, when asked if they support “the idea of government running businesses” versus a free market economy, the support for socialism decreased to 32%, while 64% stated that they support a free-run market economy.<sup>481</sup> The different results in these polls show first and foremost that people do not understand what it is that they are supporting, and secondly, it shows just how much words matter.

The confusion ultimately stems from major Democratic party leaders such as Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez misusing the term socialism. For example, Sanders often references his definition of democratic socialism to the systems of the Nordic countries. In 2016, when he was running for president he stated, “When I talk about Democratic socialism, I am not looking at Venezuela. I’m not looking at Cuba. I’m looking at countries like Denmark, like Sweden.”<sup>482</sup> The problem is that these countries should not be labeled as socialist, as they function in economies that are arguably more capitalist than America’s. According to the

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<sup>478</sup> “Fifth Annual Report on U.S. Attitudes toward Socialism, Communism, and Collectivism,” Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, November 18, 2022, <https://victimsofcommunism.org/annual-poll/2020-annual-poll/>.

<sup>479</sup> Emily Ekins and Joy Pullmann, “Why So Many Millennials Are Socialists,” Cato.org, February 15, 2016, <https://www.cato.org/commentary/why-so-many-millennials-are-socialists>.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid.

<sup>482</sup> Tim Hains, “Bernie Sanders: ‘Democratic Socialism’ Isn’t Cuba and Venezuela, ‘I’m Talking About Social Security, Medicare,’” Real Clear Politics, February 19, 2016, [https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2016/02/19/bernie\\_sanders\\_democratic\\_socialism\\_isnt\\_cuba\\_and\\_venezuela\\_im\\_talking\\_about\\_social\\_security\\_medicare.html](https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2016/02/19/bernie_sanders_democratic_socialism_isnt_cuba_and_venezuela_im_talking_about_social_security_medicare.html).

Heritage Economic Freedom Index, the Nordic countries outrank the United States in business freedom, investment freedom, and property rights, therefore, “the lesson from Scandinavian countries is that market reforms, not socialist ones, explain their prosperity.”<sup>483</sup> The Scandinavian systems “subscribe to a free-market economic model and are capitalist societies that are coupled with a strong *social welfare* component to their governments.”<sup>484</sup>

The countries of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland are prime examples of countries that have what is better known as a social democracy. The formal definition of social democracy, the correct label for Nordic countries, is “a political and social philosophy that supports economic and social interventions that promote social justice within the framework of liberal democracy and a capitalist economy.”<sup>485</sup> Democratic socialism, on the other hand, is formally recognized as “an ideology that believes in a socialist economy whereby the means of production are socially and collectively owned or controlled, alongside a democratically elected government.”<sup>486</sup> It is a system that lies between capitalism and socialism that, depending on whom one is speaking with, entails the abolition of the free market system or keeping certain parts of the capitalist system. To put it simply, in a social democracy there is a free-market capitalist economy, whereas democratic socialism typically refers to the abolition of free-market activity.

Some would argue that to be concerned about the difference between democratic socialism and social democracy is simply semantics, that “it shouldn’t matter just as long as the ideas are sound.”<sup>487</sup> Author Joshua Edward, however, writes that in the context of socialism, words do matter because of the simple fact that “socialism is dangerous.”<sup>488</sup> The deeper issue behind these labels is that people are supporting the ideology of socialism without really knowing what it entails, its oppressive conditions, who Karl Marx or Fredrich Engels were, socialism/communism’s beginnings and history, nor the crimes against humanity it caused in various countries around the world. If people are supporting ideologies that they do not truly understand, they could be in a position to ignite an irreversible transformation of the American system, even if this was not their intention. History has shown us world-changing events that were started all because of misinformation and misunderstood intentions.

## **Why is Democratic Socialism Appealing?**

Democratic socialism has become an appealing alternative to capitalism because of the latter system’s perceived failings. Millennials and “Gen-Zers” are facing many problems today similar to those which were present during the 2008 financial crisis. One of these main problems is the college and graduate school education system which has turned education into a business.

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<sup>483</sup> Ekins and Pullmann, *supra*.

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>485</sup> Joshua Edward, “Europe Is Not Socialist and Neither Are You,” Medium, August 4, 2019, <https://medium.com/three-of-hearts/europe-is-not-socialist-and-neither-are-you-bca96671ce89>.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid*.

The average student loan borrower is reported to take 20 years to pay off their loan. First-generation students are especially held at a disadvantage as they are reported to incur higher rates of debt. Being held to a disadvantage because of one's tax bracket is also a feature of the U.S. healthcare system. Further, the lack of true competition between healthcare providers means that most Americans must simply accept the plan offered by their employers. Lastly, there is a growing homelessness problem in the United States, partially due to a lack of affordable housing.

Student loans, healthcare, poverty on the streets, and a shortage of good jobs available in accordance with one's degree are vital problems in society. Capitalism, an economic system driven by profit, is the perceived reason why these issues are present and continue to compound. For Democratic Socialists, the solution to the greed and inequality caused by capitalism is to introduce a new economic and social model where the power is focused in the hands of the people. By eliminating the class system, Democratic Socialists aim to abolish the top elite in society who hold the vast majority of wealth and power in America. This, they argue, will assure that people in lower-income jobs are not held to a disadvantage because of their status. They believe someone should not be held to a lower quality of life simply because of their income or inability to pay. They advocate for each member of society to have equal access to the same opportunities as those with higher incomes, but without monthly payments plus high-interest rates for the rest of their life. Democratic socialism promises prosperity in which everyone's needs, regardless of class, are met.

Advocates of democratic socialism are especially concerned about the growing productivity gap wherein workers today are working longer hours and more efficiently, but are not being compensated for it accordingly. As one concerned millennial put it, "The vast majority of us are (replaceable) workers, and by working harder for less, we're undermining ourselves as a class. It's a vicious cycle."<sup>489</sup> These concerns have led people to look for a radical change to the current economic system. When leaders such as AOC and Sanders entered the public stage and advocated for democratic socialism, reformers finally found a name for their cause. Today, capitalism is believed by many to no longer offer the promise of the American dream.

## **The Difference Between Free-Market Economies & State-Controlled Economies**

It should be noted that the definition of capitalism changes depending on whom one is speaking with. For social democrats, capitalism is usually defined as a profit-driven economy that is the reason for greed, "vast income inequality, and lack of government protections for the poor."<sup>490</sup> However, what social democrats first fail to realize is that greed is an individual characteristic that does not come from an economic system. *Medium* author Joshua Edward writes, "Greed is caused by individual character traits influenced by psychological, spiritual,

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<sup>489</sup> Jack Kelly, "Why Young Voters Are Embracing Bernie Sanders and Democratic Socialism," *Forbes*, February 5, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2020/02/05/the-reasons-why-young-voters-are-embracing-bernie-sanders-and-socialism/#4570acc2f17>.

<sup>490</sup> CNBC, "Why Democratic Socialism Is Gaining Popularity In The United States," video, 26:33, July 27, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BlrDpTGRREA>.

environmental or perhaps even cultural factors.”<sup>491</sup> Greed can ultimately be found in any economic system; therefore, it is best to have an economic system in place that can best regulate this natural human tendency.

In capitalism, consumers make the decisions on what goods and services are available. If consumers need or want cars more than refrigerators or farm vehicles, then the market (buyers and sellers) will reflect that. This is because markets create prices, and it is through prices that the demand for resources is determined. As consumers create the demand, laborers and businesses provide the appropriate supply of goods. The selection and quantity of various resources and goods in the market reflect the interests, desires, and needs of “the masses.” As consumers purchase the goods, entrepreneurs and business owners are rewarded through profit. Contrary to critics, profit does not indicate greed. Profit ensures “human cooperation and serves to make sure that the earth’s resources are maximized to serve the best interests of humanity.”<sup>492</sup> Simply put, profit can be understood as the “reward for making good decisions.”<sup>493</sup> So, when an entrepreneur is “greedy” in capitalism, it benefits the consumers and workers as well, because everyone is making a profit and reaping the benefits of an improved standard of living. Contrary to Marx’s thought, workers are not exploited, but rather earn benefits from “increased worker pay, benefits, security, and job opportunities.”<sup>494</sup> If exploitation or unjust conditions occur, there is the rule of law to regulate, and freedom to find a new occupation. Further, consumers can choose not to give their business to companies they disagree with or find unethical. Transactions do not happen in capitalism unless it is beneficial or wanted for both parties.

In socialism and communism, people do not have a choice and must take the goods and services given to them. Consumers no longer determine what is on the market, but rather these decisions are left to the elite, such as the politicians, authoritarian leaders, and members of the centralized planned economy who do not have specialized knowledge. The reality is that “no single person can imagine a way to fulfill the needs and desires of every single other person.”<sup>495</sup> This is why the “experts” who work for the State in centrally planned economies have failed time and time again. A group of economists and “experts,” no matter how intelligent, does not have the ability to predict the future or know what people will want, and in what quantities. Additionally, the central planners will eventually run out of the public’s money. These choices are instead best left to entrepreneurs who are driven by profits and losses. Entrepreneurs watch the consumer-led market and are influenced to invest based on what consumers spend their money on. As a result, entrepreneurs are encouraged to create, know how to best respond to the needs of the market, and ultimately are rewarded for innovation. Because of incentives, entrepreneurs are willing to risk their own money to buy resources and build products to sell on the market. However, this is only possible through property rights where individuals own the resources and means of production.

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<sup>491</sup> Edward, *supra*.

<sup>492</sup> “Economics for Beginners,” Mises Institute, June 4, 2020, <https://mises.org/economics-beginners>.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>494</sup> Mark R. Levin, *American Marxism* (New York, NY: Threshold Editions, 2021), 4.

<sup>495</sup> Institute of World Politics, “Are We Becoming More Radical? The Rise of Democratic Socialism in America,” video, 1:08:12, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gB3xPe7ub40&t=2892s>.

When the government controls the means of production and resources, there is no incentive to innovate or work harder, because the rewards go back to the State. As seen in the former Soviet Union, Venezuela, Cuba, and other centrally planned economies, shortages are a feature of the system. On the other hand, a surplus of unwanted goods is also a prominent problem. Central planning and resource allocation always result in imbalances in every sector of society. This is because “central planners operate based on their own knowledge” and not the “collective knowledge of society.”<sup>496</sup> De-centralized market economies avoid these pitfalls because they can adjust and adapt to consumer choices. Ultimately, communists and socialists fail economically because their theories are “not grounded in economics” but rather “in an appeal to equality.”<sup>497</sup> Equality “is an artificial and forced condition that has to be centrally directed to function.”<sup>498</sup> This principle can only be ensured through an “equality police” which shows up with force. Furthermore, equality goes against human nature, as it does not allow one to become better, or more virtuous. Humans were not created to be equal, but rather to excel in their individual abilities and talents.

Ultimately, centrally planned economies are flawed because they take away one's freedom to choose. When the State steps in to regulate the resources, it always must use coercion and force. As witnessed throughout history, centrally planned economies always lead to more authoritarianism. This is because after the State begins to lose its grip on society, all democratic institutions and ideals are swept away.<sup>499</sup> As Lord Acton famously remarked, “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”<sup>500</sup> Freedom is necessary if societies, and not only the elite, are to become richer and more prosperous. As showcased in the index of economic freedom, countries throughout the world that exemplify private property rights, low government size (taxes and spending), business freedom, and open markets, are listed high on the economic freedom score scale. As a result, these populations tend to have a better quality of life materially, and also have higher life expectancy rates. The key to achievement in all these areas is freedom. Capitalism is the freedom of consumer choice and property, while socialism and communism are the elimination of choice and property. Socialism and communism pledge equality, yet the result is always the same: everyone is equally poor, both economically and spiritually.

## Wealth Can be Created

Another common criticism from socialists is that capitalism is the reason for income inequality. As stated by Sanders, “You don't necessarily need a choice of 23 underarm spray deodorants or of 18 different pairs of sneakers when children are hungry in this country.”<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> “Economics for Beginners,” *supra*.

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>499</sup> *Are We Becoming More Radical? The Rise of Democratic Socialism in America*, YouTube (Institute of World Politics, 2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gB3xPe7ub40&t=2892s>.

<sup>500</sup> Patrick Newman, “Cronyism: Liberty versus Power in Early America, 1607–1849,” Mises Institute, August 17, 2021, <https://mises.org/library/cronyism-liberty-versus-power-early-america-1607-1849>.

<sup>501</sup> Ed Krayewski, “Bernie Sanders: Don’t Need 23 Choices of Deodorant, 18 Choices of Sneakers When Kids Are Going Hungry,” Reason.com, May 26, 2015, <https://reason.com/2015/05/26/bernie-sanders-dont-need-23-choices-of-d/>.

Basically, he believes that the limited amount of resources in the world should be freed up to help the poor. Those who are poor have fewer choices because the capitalist economy uses up the world's scarce resources. This quote from Sanders signifies that capitalism favors the rich at the expense of the poor. However, these claims are based on the idea that there is a fixed amount of money and wealth in the world that cannot be changed. This is not true in a free-market economy, because wealth can be created. When the rich gain profit, it does not take away from the "fixed pile." On the contrary, wealth and prosperity increase for everyone in society. Entrepreneurship benefits everyone. In America, the standard of living has increased for every class in society: "Middle-class wealth has increased 82.1% since 1990."<sup>502</sup> Ever since the industrial revolution, the world as a whole is richer than it ever has been. Innovation and entrepreneurship provide more options for everyone, without taking away from the poor in society. The resources in the world are not wasted; they are best regulated in an economy that responds to consumer wants.

### **American Capitalism Suffers from Cronyism and Lacks Healthy Competition**

This is not to say that capitalism is without flaws. Historically, the Industrial Revolution produced unjust conditions for workers, such as when women and children were working in unsanitary, unsafe conditions with low pay. Business owners were treating people as tools to make the highest possible profit. In the current age, there is the rule of law and court systems to fight these injustices if they should occur. Further, there is the freedom to leave and find a new position. Despite these improvements, capitalism in America has still produced a lack of protection for the poor. As stated by Bernie Sanders, "You have a handful of people who control our economy, you have maybe 2% of the population that owns 1/3 of the entire wealth of America, 80% of stocks, 90% of the bonds, and these people have incredible power."<sup>503</sup> This inequality, where "the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a small number of people," is not the result of the free-market economy, but rather of cronyism.<sup>504</sup>

Today, the main problem capitalism in America faces is the issue of a growing lack of competition, mainly fueled by cronyism. In a truly capitalist, profit-and-loss economy, there is a healthy level of competition. However, in America, it can be argued that the last decade has seen a growing monopoly problem. In the United States, eleven giant companies control virtually all the food and drink products consumers purchase. These corporations are Kellogg's, General Mills, Kraft-Heinz Company, Mondelez International, MARS, Coca-Cola, Unilever, Procter & Gamble, PepsiCo, Johnson & Johnson, and Nestle. The dominance doesn't stop there: seven major corporations own 182 beauty companies, including Johnson & Johnson, Shiseido, Coty, Procter & Gamble, Unilever, L'Oréal, and Estée Lauder. This monopolistic power pervades the health care system, the clothing industry, the media, agriculture, airlines, and even the beer

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<sup>502</sup> Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, "2022 State of the Union: US Standard of Living, Income and Poverty," USAFacts, February 20, 2023, <https://usafacts.org/state-of-the-union-2022/standard-living/>.

<sup>503</sup> "Why Democratic Socialism Is Gaining Popularity in The United States," *supra*.

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid*.

business. Furthermore, no one can deny the ever-growing power and influence of “Big Tech,” such as Google, Meta (Facebook), Apple, and Amazon. Even if these corporations are bigger because they’re better in quality and service, their dominance can stop smaller businesses, startups, and potential Amazon #2 or Facebook #2 from ever having a chance.

The limited concentration of ownership of the companies in the US means that the few wealthy owners (e.g., Bezos, Gates, Musk) monopolize the profits of economic growth. In fact, the richest companies in the US have become more efficient at siphoning wealth from consumers than creating wealth. The owners are not reinvesting nor redistributing back into society enough. Furthermore, corporate giants are not held responsible for their tax breaks. For example, “Amazon avoided about \$5.2 billion in corporate federal income taxes in 2021,”<sup>505</sup> “Tesla indicates its foreign tax bill came to \$839 million, its state tax bill was only \$9 million. And its federal tax bill was zero,”<sup>506</sup> and billionaire Michael Bloomberg only paid, “\$70.7 million in income tax on almost \$2 billion in income. That amounts to just a 3.7% conventional income tax rate. Between 2014 and 2018, Bloomberg had a true tax rate of 1.30%.”<sup>507</sup> These are only a few examples of the many billionaires taking advantage of the system. Billionaires can pay a lower tax rate than the average American due to “an array of techniques that aren’t available to those of lesser means to get around the tax system routinely and legally.”<sup>508</sup> Their tax breaks then transfer the burden onto the middle class.

Even if companies such as Amazon and Tesla are helping society prosper overall, it is immoral for owners such as Bezos and Musk to own such a staggering amount of wealth. The net worth of Jeff Bezos is listed at 119.2 billion while the net worth of Elon Musk stands at 151.8 billion. Their wealth is more than the average GDP of small countries such as Slovakia or Croatia. Other names such as Larry Page, Sergey Brin, and Bill Gates also belong to this list of billionaires with overwhelming wealth. Profit doesn’t mean greed, it means prosperity; however, there should be more regulation assuring the reinvestment of corporate profit back into society. This reinvestment would not have to necessarily mean higher taxation rates. It could look like the building of new schools in poor neighborhoods, providing more resources and housing for the homeless, or aiding students with college tuition. Even if billionaires today claim to contribute to philanthropic services, one can walk through any major city in the United States and see that their contribution back into America is evidently insufficient.

This ability to get around the tax system is better known as cronyism. In crony capitalism, the government favors specific businesses at the expense of others because of their connections or power. Companies will lobby the government, which then “‘picks winners’ and

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<sup>505</sup> Matthew Gardner, “Amazon Avoids More than \$5 Billion in Corporate Income Taxes, Reports 6 Percent Tax Rate on \$35 Billion of US Income,” ITEP, February 7, 2022, <https://itep.org/amazon-avoids-more-than-5-billion-in-corporate-income-taxes-reports-6-percent-tax-rate-on-35-billion-of-us-income/>.

<sup>506</sup> Chris Isidore, “Elon Musk’s US Tax Bill: \$11 Billion. Tesla’s: \$0 | CNN Business,” CNN, February 10, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/10/investing/elon-musk-tesla-zero-tax-bill/index.html>.

<sup>507</sup> Jesse Eisinger, Jeff Ernsthausen, and Paul Kiel, “The Secret IRS Files: Trove of Never-before-Seen Records Reveal How the Wealthiest Avoid Income Tax,” ProPublica, June 8, 2021, <https://www.propublica.org/article/the-secret-irs-files-trove-of-never-before-seen-records-reveal-how-the-wealthiest-avoid-income-tax>.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid.



thereby also picks losers, on the basis of political influence rather than merit.”<sup>509</sup> This favoring can look like receiving special subsidies, no-bid contracts, trade protection, blocking competitors from entering the market, and tax preferences. When the government regulates an industry, those who are not well-connected must spend a considerable amount of money to keep up with the new political regulations. For example, a small start-up company cannot afford the vast number of lobbyists and lawyers that companies such as Google have. In the end, this creates significant barriers to entry and “compliance costs,” which discourage smaller and less wealthy businesses from entering the market. The larger businesses can retain control, as they have successfully lobbied for special privileges. Simply put, in cronyism the system is rigged to reduce competition and favor the politicians’ and bureaucrats’ selected businesses. As a result, the businesses that benefit from cronyism end up serving the elites who fund them, and not the consumer that purchases the products. A further implication is that all of society is robbed of potential creations and innovations that could have come into being. In crony capitalism, only the elite benefit.

Today, major companies such as Google, Microsoft, Amazon, and Meta (Facebook) have offices in Washington D.C. and spend tens of millions of dollars on attorneys and lobbying. Ultimately, this started because these businesses had to protect themselves from having the government destroy them; however, the government eventually began to grant them special favors. Laws were enacted which provided more favorable conditions for these dominant corporations, and harmful regulations were established to stop any potential competitors from entering the market. All these laws, regulations, and favors create a world where entrepreneurs will look to supply the needs of the government instead of the consumer. The result is that “it’s become easier for businesses to profit through the halls of Congress rather than the marketplace.”<sup>510</sup> The massive economic power of dominant corporations allows them to continue to gain political influence over “how markets are organized, maintained, and enforced,” which only leads to their further economic power.<sup>511</sup> They then are able to consume the smaller companies and continue acquiring properties. It has become “easier and cheaper to buy competitors rather than out-innovate them.”<sup>512</sup>

Using the example of crony capitalism, democratic socialists such as Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have pushed the message that capitalism breeds greed, economic inequality, and an unjust society. It must be clarified that the two are different and cannot be regarded as interchangeable terms. Cronyism is immoral because the government has been bought off. True capitalism is moral because it creates wealth for each party involved and transactions generally won’t occur if both parties don’t benefit. Cronyism is an important issue and capitalism has its flaws, yet capitalism and the free-market economy have achieved the best prosperity for all walks of life better than any other economic and social system. This all proves

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<sup>509</sup> “Crony Capitalism: Unhealthy Relations between Business and Government,” Committee for Economic Development, October 24, 2015, <https://www.ced.org/reports/crony-capitalism-unhealthy-relations-between-business-and-government>

<sup>510</sup> FW Staff Admin, “Big Corporations and Big Government Go Hand in Hand,” FreedomWorks, June 29, 2022, <https://www.freedomworks.org/big-corporations-and-big-government-go-hand-in-han/>.

<sup>511</sup> “The Monopolization of America,” video, 11:03, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLfO-2t1qPQ&t=130s>.

<sup>512</sup> John Mauldin, “America Has a Monopoly Problem,” Forbes Magazine, October 12, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnmauldin/2019/04/11/america-has-a-monopoly-problem/?sh=132d7b312972>.

that economics should be left in the hands of the consumers, not in the hands of government planners. Less government involvement and separating the economic system from the State is the solution to saving the free-market economy in America.

## **Socialism is Not the Answer**

The problems in capitalism need to be addressed, but socialism is not the answer. Greed and inequality can be managed better in capitalism than in socialism or communism. In capitalism, consumers can make choices about where to spend their money. In State-planned economies, there is no choice. Further, greed is an individual characteristic, inevitable and present in every person. However, it is best regulated in a system that “rewards greed” because everyone is profiting from it. Capitalism “capitalizes” on corruptible people, socialism exacerbates their corruption. No one person or group of elites can be trusted to be consistently altruistic.

Democratic Socialists want to eliminate greed, yet advocate for a system that empowers the elite more than a capitalist system would. Those who run a State-planned economy cannot be trusted because every human person is corruptible. Democratic socialist Julia Salazar explained that today’s version of socialism would be different because “democratic socialism is led by the people, there’s accountability at every level. Socialist governments throughout history, some of their problems have really been due to a lack of democracy and a socialism that really is driven by the grassroots and by the people.”<sup>513</sup> But the question then becomes: who are “the people”? Is it the whole society, or would this “grassroots” government only represent a radical left social agenda? Furthermore, even if leaders are democratically elected in democratic socialism, how can we know that the people who are in charge can be trusted both politically and economically? Who are the people in charge of determining who gets what?<sup>514</sup> There must be regulations in place that can stop those in the government from becoming too powerful, both politically and economically.

Even if democratically elected, no person or group of people can be trusted not to become corrupted. Throughout history, centrally planned economies always led to more authoritarianism. For example, in the Soviet Union, “Soviet socialism required utmost control not just over the economy but also over people's lives—it demanded conformity, not autonomy, as a centralized bureaucratic force attempted to achieve equality of outcomes. Thus, Soviet officials sought to stamp out any source of possible opposition to state authority, including from artists, musicians, religious clergy, and even regular people making jokes or raising complaints about the government.”<sup>515</sup> Economic control almost always leads to political control. This is because poor economic conditions (unemployment, lack of goods, limited food) lead to the government losing control, and ultimately causes political unrest. Control can only be regained again through State oppression and coercion. The world has witnessed time and time again how allowing a few powerful people in government to control the means of production along with

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<sup>513</sup> “Why Democratic Socialism Is Gaining Popularity in The United States,” *supra*.

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>515</sup> Ekins and Pullmann, *op. cit*.

abolishing private property is always a dangerous idea. The reality is that “socialism starts with economic promises of freedom yet ends with control in every sector of a person’s life.”<sup>516</sup>

## **The Promises of Democratic Socialism**

The goals of democratic socialism can be perceived as well-intended, as they guarantee equality and access to basic needs such as healthcare and education at a reasonable price. The promises of Bernie Sanders and the party known as the Democratic Socialists of America further include, “federal jobs guarantee, higher minimum wage, mass unionization of the work force, stronger protection for those unions, tuition free university, and some basic form of universal income.”<sup>517</sup> The golden question, however, is how will the country pay for all of this? Estimates from nonpartisan and left-leaning groups estimate the total price tag for everything amounts to 42.665 trillion.<sup>518</sup>

Perhaps independently these reforms seem possible, but once they are added together it is evident that all the promises of the DSA are too costly. Still, regardless of the price tag, these reforms continue to be attractive to a generation of people who are unsure of the quality of their future. They are willing to take the risk of putting matters into the hands of the government and allowing more government control. The promises of free health insurance for all, decent retirement, a good job, housing, and no student loans are of course appealing to most people. Socialism promises so many great things for free; however, the golden rule of economics is that there is “no such thing as a free lunch.” Everything is always paid for in tradeoffs.

There is rarely any explanation of how this utopia is to be achieved. It is evident that it would be achieved partially through “taxing the rich” and then distributing that wealth into social programs. There is, however, no unanimous agreement on which tax brackets qualify as “the rich” and what would be a “fair” tax rate for each class. The reality is that the policies of social democrats will end up affecting the middle class the most. The government will not end up taxing the rich corporations the highest; rather the average, middle-class worker will feel the effects the most. Taking from the working class and redistributing the wealth has been tried in various countries. As seen time and time again, it does not work because it doesn’t resolve the main issue, namely that redistribution does not produce anything new. Redistributing wealth doesn’t increase the productivity of society, nor does it create more wealth. People in every class lack incentives to be more productive or prosperous.

Certainly a social safety net is needed, but is the federal government the proper one to assume that role? State control to help the poor takes away an individual’s chance at prosperity and flourishing. Further, households should not feel disincentivized to work towards a higher profit. In accordance with this, one should not feel guilty for having wealth and choosing to help one’s family first before helping others. It is one’s personal choice to choose where one will

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<sup>516</sup> Institute of World Politics, “Are We Becoming More Radical? The Rise of Democratic Socialism in America,” video, 1:08:12, May 28, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gB3xPe7ub40&t=2892s>.

<sup>517</sup> Edward, op. cit.

<sup>518</sup> “Why Democratic Socialism Is Gaining Popularity In The United States,” supra.

donate money to help others. Other economic systems also want to help people, but not at the expense of one's prosperity.

Furthermore, while Sanders loves to take inspiration from the Nordic societies, he should be clearer in his campaigns about what the effects of raising the middle-class tax rate would be. When looking at the Nordic countries, "The top income tax in Denmark is almost 60 percent. They have a 25 percent sales tax and on cars the incise duties are up to 180 percent. In total, Danish taxes come to almost half of the national income compared to around 25 percent in the US. Quite a substantial difference."<sup>519</sup> When the numbers are put into perspective, it shows how unaffordable the Socialist model is unless the United States should want to transform into the system of Scandinavian countries. This would mean significantly higher tax rates (50-60%) for all tax brackets, including the middle class.

Besides unaffordable tax rates, there are various other reasons why the United States could not adopt the Nordic model. The main reason is that more government regulation would mean that "citizens first must be willing to put their faith in the government."<sup>520</sup> Historically, American's trust in government has always ranked low. Second, it should be noted that the successes of the Nordic countries were established before their socialized policies took into effect. As Swedish author Nima Sanandaii notes, "Many of the desirable features of Scandinavian societies, such as low income-inequality, low levels of poverty and high levels of economic growth predated the development of the welfare state. These and other indicators began to deteriorate after the expansion of the welfare state and the increase in taxes to fund it."<sup>521</sup>

Instead of aspiring to follow the Nordic countries' model, which holds a combined population of about 27 million people, the United States should follow an economic and social system specific to the needs of America, which would help the most amount of people. This can be achieved best through a model that inspires people to solve problems. The free-market economy encourages this behavior because it rewards entrepreneurs who seek better and more efficient ways of completing tasks. Entrepreneurs are willing to risk their own money to purchase resources and labor in order to build new products. This is possible through individual property rights, a key factor not available in communist societies. The entrepreneur will invest in machines, buildings, resources, and laborers to create an innovative product. They will then sell the final product for a higher price than the production price, hoping to make a profit. If they do not, they can sell their resources to other entrepreneurs, who might make better use of the resources.

The free-market economy is regulated by consumers, who choose where to spend their money and ultimately determine where the entrepreneur invests his money. Limited resources should be left to the entrepreneurs who are willing to take risks and are driven by profit and loss.

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<sup>519</sup> "Danish PM IN US: Denmark Is Not Socialist," The Local Denmark, November 1, 2015, <https://www.thelocal.dk/20151101/danish-pm-in-us-denmark-is-not-socialist>.

<sup>520</sup> Jim Geraghty, "Ten Reasons We Can't, And Shouldn't, Be Nordic," *National Review*, March 13, 2018, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2018/03/ten-reasons-we-cant-and-shouldnt-be-nordic/>.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid.

Capitalism is a decentralized way of allocating scarce resources. Market economies can adjust and adapt, assuring that the world's resources will not be wasted. Capitalism is the economic system that best guarantees human flourishing, prosperity, and wealth accumulation. In communism, incentives to create and innovate for others are abolished. As a result, it creates an economic system that does not reflect what people want and eliminates freedom of choice. Accordingly, when the government intervenes to control the market or resources, it always resorts to force and coercion. A free-market economy encourages peaceful cooperation, because, in the end, the entrepreneur, laborer, and consumer all manage to benefit. Even if the free-market economy in America has its problems, dignifying socialism or the social welfare states of European countries is not the appropriate solution.

### **Other Possible Explanations for Why Socialism is Gaining Traction Today**

Although the need to reform America's economic system is the driving force that has brought socialism back into the mainstream, other factors are influencing the rising support of socialism as well. One theory is the decline in conservative values. Conservatism is not appealing to the majority of young adults, and they are starting to prefer a more liberal approach not just towards politics but also to life. As conservative values are no longer tolerated, something else must take their place. A phenomenon known as "woke culture" is spreading. At the core of "wokeism" is an attitude of, "If you're not with us, you're against us." Some recent trends of woke culture include a "hate America" mentality, aggressive mobs, ruining lives of people who go against their agenda, propaganda, racism, and genderism. Society is encouraging individuals "to identify with groups—ethnic, sexual, and otherwise—and to think of Good and Evil as a matter of power dynamics among the groups."<sup>522</sup> One can see these woke, progressive ideals in academia, corporations, and the media throughout the West. Furthermore, the unwillingness and fear of many Americans to speak out in opposition only contributes to the rise of this "soft totalitarianism," since people can risk losing their livelihoods for speaking out.

This cultural revolution, led by the far left and the woke, seeks to transform human nature and replace the foundational order of the United States. All of this is simply rebranded Marxism. It is promoted in order to transform American society and create a socialist "utopia." As stated by Mark Levin, a heaven on earth and the ideal citizen will be formed, "if only the existing society and culture are radically transformed or abandoned altogether, and the individual surrenders more of his liberty, free will, and security to the cause."<sup>523</sup> These totalitarian tendencies are creating an America where there is no discussion, debate, or middle ground between parties or people. This ever-increasing polarization of American society can lead to the country's downfall.

Another reason why socialism is growing in popularity could be that Americans overall are starting to read less. A 2019 study reported that 24% of American adults have not read a

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<sup>522</sup> Dreher, xi.

<sup>523</sup> Levin, *American Marxism*, 14.

book within the past year.<sup>524</sup> They further found that the cause of this decline was linked to income levels, with lower-income households reading less overall than those with higher incomes. According to the study, “About 17 percent of those making over \$75,000 a year did not read books while 36 percent of those making less than \$30,000 did not.”<sup>525</sup> The study also found a correlation between increased reading and higher education levels. In addition, as of 2018, “less than 20 percent of U.S. teens report reading a book, magazine or newspaper daily for pleasure, while more than 80 percent say they use social media every day, according to research published by the American Psychological Association.”<sup>526</sup>

Reading fewer books has given way to the consumption of more digital media such as online articles, podcasts, blogs, and Twitter posts. In fact, 18% of Americans say YouTube (Google) is their first stop for news, while 45% of Americans say Facebook is the first site they check daily.<sup>527</sup> Further, Google and Facebook control 78% of the U.S. digital advertising market space, which is valued at \$80 billion.<sup>528</sup> These media giants such as Twitter, Google, and Facebook have become advanced at targeting users based on their algorithms, such that people will often only see stories and articles related to their preferences. This information is biased and can limit people from reading sources outside of their personal views. The further implication is that most of the information the average person consumes is written in short, targeted, and to-the-point pieces. At the simple click of a button, people will share a news article without reading past the headline. For example, “Recent data from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism show only 51% of consumers who “read” an online news story actually read the whole article, while 26% read part, and 22% looked at just the headline or a few lines.”<sup>529</sup> This “glossed-over” reading can lead to the rapid spread of disinformation and false news stories.

Lastly, people are unaware of the fact that the articles and news they share are incorrect, because the overall study of history is on the decline. American school systems have not taught much about socialism and communism in general, and when they do it is in a positive light. As a result, “To young people, socialism is an abstract concept.”<sup>530</sup> Since the ideology is not fully understood, this could be why young adults are more open to being labeled as socialists. They did not grow up with the stigma socialism had during the Cold War, and it is viewed simply as a word to represent what they support. They do not care much what their desired policies are called, so long as the result is a more equitable society. If being socialist means having free

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<sup>524</sup> Abigail J Hess, “24 Percent of American Adults Haven’t Read a Book in the Past Year-Here’s Why,” CNBC, January 29, 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/01/29/24-percent-of-american-adults-havent-read-a-book-in-the-past-year--heres-why-.html>.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid.

<sup>526</sup> Jean M Twenge, “Teens Today Spend More Time on Digital Media, Less Time Reading,” American Psychological Association, August 20, 2018, <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2018/08/teenagers-read-book>.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid.

<sup>528</sup> Kat Chrysostom, “Breaking the Monopolies of Facebook, Google, and Amazon,” Tedx Talks, video, 12:12, December 6, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4m-phHynmE&t=155s>.

<sup>529</sup> Jeremy Simon, “Sharing News You Didn’t Read Can Feel like Expertise,” Futurity, August 31, 2022, <https://www.futurity.org/sharing-news-expert-2792872-2/#:~:text=Recent%20data%20from%20the%20Reuters,headline%20or%20a%20few%20lines>.

<sup>530</sup> Jack Kelly, “Why Young Voters Are Embracing Bernie Sanders and Democratic Socialism,” Forbes, February 5, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2020/02/05/the-reasons-why-young-voters-are-embracing-bernie-sanders-and-socialism/#4570accc2f17>.

health care, education, and a guaranteed job then that is what they want to be called. However, when people put themselves in a position to support something without truly understanding what it is, they risk changing society forever. One generation has the ability to change the outcome of the world simply by misinterpreting an agenda.

## **The Main Message Against Democratic Socialism and Communism**

Although a world that resembles the former Soviet Union might not be the intention of today's Democratic Socialists, the rise of any form of socialism could possibly lead to communism coming in through the back door.<sup>531</sup> Socialism introduced even as “democratic” is a slippery slope. Primate Wyszyński writes, “Studying the history of socialism, we see that it constantly loses its supporters to communism; it is simply a nursery, a preparatory school for communism.”<sup>532</sup> The main danger is that communism and socialism are totalitarian ideologies advocated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by revolutionaries who did not consider the anthropology of the human person. Marx's misconstruing of human nature is precisely why communism is destined to fail and will never work any time it is tried. First and foremost, no one person or group of people can be trusted to be altruistic and have the common good in mind all the time. This is why the common argument that the “right person” for socialism has not come along and that it hasn't been done the “right way” is flawed. Further, even if those in power should be democratically elected, it is unlikely that they will represent the interests and values of the whole society. There needs to be a social and economic model in place that regulates human nature and can stop self-interested, corruptible people from becoming too powerful.

Second, people were not created to be equal, but rather to flourish and advance in their various capabilities. The only way to enforce equality would be through an “equality police,” which would usher in repression and force. Lastly, it is a system that ends up controlling every aspect of a person's life. It starts with the promise of economic freedom and equality, but ends up with everyone in society being equally poor, in both materials and morals. Control over the means of production and private property always leads to more authoritarianism. Neither communism nor socialism can address the diverse problems present in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One can recognize America's shortcomings and failures without advocating for a broken, repeatedly failed ideology. It is best to reform the current social and economic models instead of introducing an outdated “democratic” socialist model. Let us not forget that “most of the evil in this world is done by people with good intentions.”<sup>533</sup> Lastly, let us also remember Ronald Reagan's famous words, “Freedom is a fragile thing and it's never more than one generation away from extinction. It is not ours by way of inheritance; it must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation, for it comes only once to a people.”<sup>534</sup>

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<sup>531</sup> “Why Democratic Socialism Is Gaining Popularity In The United States,” *supra*.

<sup>532</sup> Wyszyński, *Love & Social Justice*, 321.

<sup>533</sup> T. S. Eliot, “Most of the Evil in This World Is Done by People with Good Intentions,” Quote Investigator, December 22, 2019, <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2019/12/19/intentions/>.

<sup>534</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Inaugural Address (Public Ceremony),” Ronald Reagan Archives, January 5, 1967, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/january-5-1967-inaugural-address-public-ceremony>.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion and Moving Forward: How can We Apply John Paul II's Message to the Challenges of Today?

*"We must learn not to be afraid, we must rediscover a spirit of hope and a spirit of trust. Hope is not empty optimism springing from a naïve confidence that the future will necessarily be better than the past. Hope and trust are the premise of responsible activity and nurtured in conscience."* – Pope John Paul II at the 50<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the United Nations, 1995 <sup>535</sup>

John Paul II's noble character can be attributed to the fact that he endured a difficult life. He grew up under two totalitarian regimes, had lost his whole family by the age of 20, and witnessed his friends, peers, and acquaintances either murdered or sent to labor camps. Despite it all, he never lost his faith in God, and even believed that something good could come out of these injustices. His role in life was to be a spiritual leader and to bring people to the gospel; however, one cannot deny the impact he had on the world stage as well. He was able to help take down Soviet oppression in Central and Eastern Europe by instilling hope in people and breaking down the barrier of fear that communism imposed on people. This was achieved mainly through invoking people's spirituality and faith, but also by reminding Poles of their special history and culture. The final words he proclaimed at Victory Square reflect this: "Let your Spirit descend. Let your Spirit descend. And renew the face of the earth, the face of this land."<sup>536</sup> It was the "revolution of conscience" in society, as stated by George Weigel, which inspired people to begin organizing themselves.<sup>537</sup> In addition, the downfall of communism was achieved by John Paul's ability to meet and build relationships with political figures such as Ronald Reagan, Lech Wałęsa, and General Jaruzelski, among others. In this way, he used his papal diplomacy to improve relations between the Vatican, the U.S., and Soviet-occupied Poland, while also influencing political change.

John Paul II was the ideal candidate to fight communism on both a political and spiritual front. He was able to influence people because of his charismatic qualities: he was courageous, principled, forgiving, humble, a great communicator, and holy. Most of all, he was not afraid to challenge the communist view and speak face-to-face with communists. His peaceful, yet assertive example allowed the collapse of communism to be largely nonviolent. Above all, "He was the right man in the right place at the right time to shape world history."<sup>538</sup> His personal life story and perseverance in the face of life's challenges can offer a message of hope that many people today are missing. The messages he often quoted during his papacy, "Be not afraid" and "Never give up on hope," are convictions he himself followed, and they remind people that there is nothing to fear. With current trends on the rise, such as support for socialism and woke culture,

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<sup>535</sup> John Paul II, "Address of his Holiness, John Paul II," The Holy See, sec. 16, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1995/october/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_05101995\\_address-to-uno.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1995/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_05101995_address-to-uno.html).

<sup>536</sup> John Paul II, "Homily of his Holiness, John Paul II," The Holy See, sec. 4, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19790602\\_polonia-varsavia.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790602_polonia-varsavia.html).

<sup>537</sup> George Weigel, *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3.

<sup>538</sup> The Editors, "The Legacy of John Paul II," *America Magazine*, March 22, 2018, <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2018/03/22/legacy-john-paul-ii>.



historical figures such as John Paul II need to be remembered now more than ever. More than just being remembered, John Paul II's lessons need to be brought into the future to help us fight today's challenges. The main issue of today stems from the loss of truth and human identity.

The core issue with socialism, communism, and wokeism is that their ideals go against human nature and do not have a clear position on the human identity. The politics and economics of these ideologies are not grounded in the truth and do not provide the ideal conditions for human flourishing. Without a clear position on what is right and wrong, what true freedom entails, the human person, and human finality, there cannot be true democracy. The words of John Paul II affirm this: "As history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism."<sup>539</sup> Like John Paul II, we should strive for a better culture and never lose sight of the dignity of the human person. John Paul II teaches his followers that evil can never be overcome through retaliating with more evil, but only with love and goodness. He once stated, "Love explained everything to me. Love solved everything for me. That is why I admire love wherever it is found."<sup>540</sup> The issues of today cannot be solved with hatred, as it will only cause the situation to escalate.

John Paul II also teaches us the importance of civic bravery and bringing people together. People can create the most impact and change when they organize themselves. This was particularly evident during the 1979 pilgrimage, and later with the formation of Solidarity. Communism can control people best when they are isolated and fearful. It is also important to note that throughout his life, John Paul II reached people who were not only Catholic or religious. He often proclaimed a universal message of freedom and human rights that inspired all people. He lived out his legacy of unity by bringing youth together through the creation of World Youth Day and the establishment of the World Day of Prayer. Additionally, he was committed to repairing and strengthening relations with Jews, Muslims, Orthodox, and other faiths. John Paul II reminds us that peace and communication are essential for the foundation of any relationship, personal or political.

Above all, what this fight against communism shows, and what John Paul II was indicating through his various works, is that you cannot change human nature. Political and socio-economic systems should be designed only according to the way humans are, not around a utopian idea of people. In order to achieve human flourishing, society must be a place where religious freedom is protected, labor is humane, family is valued, and private property is respected. For these reasons, freedom must be prioritized, and the human person must be valued. John Paul II reminds people that each person has a specific vocation assigned to him, and that each person should strive to be creative with his given abilities and talents. This is not possible in a system that restrains and dictates lives. People must be able to freely pursue their callings. As John Paul II once stated, "All men and women are entrusted with the task of crafting their own

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<sup>539</sup> John Paul II, "Centesimus Annus," sec. 46.

<sup>540</sup> "John Paul II- His Thoughts," Servants of the Pierced Hearts of Jesus and Mary, 2023, [https://www.piercedhearts.org/jpii/thoughts/his\\_thoughts.htm](https://www.piercedhearts.org/jpii/thoughts/his_thoughts.htm).

life: in a certain sense, they are to make of it a work of art, a masterpiece.”<sup>541</sup> This means that the freedom to act and to think cannot be taken away; otherwise, as witnessed through tyrants such as Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Castro, and Pol Pot, society will collapse. Do not challenge God, the creator of human nature, for you will not win.

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<sup>541</sup> John Paul II, “Letter of his Holiness, John Paul II to Artists,” The Holy See, April 22, 1999, sec. 2, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_23041999\\_artists.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_23041999_artists.html).

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