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## A POLISH POPE AND AN AMERICAN PRESIDENT: 1979–1989

General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!

—Ronald Reagan<sup>1</sup>

At the twentieth anniversary celebration of the fall of the Berlin Wall, an observer in Berlin described the attempts by some in the West to rewrite the history of the collapse of communism. During the four-day celebration of that anniversary, speeches contained no mention of U.S. President Ronald Reagan, communism, who built the Wall (and why); no historical context; and only a few mentions of Pope John Paul II. But Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet leader who desperately tried to hold the Soviet system together, and who initially feared and opposed German reunification and the removal of the Berlin Wall, was mentioned repeatedly.<sup>2</sup> Re-

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Remarks on East-West Relations at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin, June 12, 1987” [[http://www.reaganfoundation.org/tgcdetail.aspx?session\\_args=28B48886-035B-4CF5-AB71-4B32170BAB55&p=TG0923RRS&h1=0&h2=0&sw=&lm=Reagan&args\\_a=cms&args\\_b=1&argsb=N&tx=1748](http://www.reaganfoundation.org/tgcdetail.aspx?session_args=28B48886-035B-4CF5-AB71-4B32170BAB55&p=TG0923RRS&h1=0&h2=0&sw=&lm=Reagan&args_a=cms&args_b=1&argsb=N&tx=1748), accessed on 15.02.2015].

<sup>2</sup> Michael Reagan with Jim Denney, *The New Reagan Revolution: How Ronald Reagan’s Principles Can Restore America’s Greatness* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2011), 166–168. After Reagan left office and before the publication of his writings, the Russians expressed astonishment at the refusal of American political, academic, and media elites to give Reagan any credit for his achievements. For a recent example, see Will Bunch, *Tear Down This Myth: How the Reagan Legacy Has Distorted Our Politics and Haunts Our Future* (New York: Free Press, 2009). Praise for Reagan contradicts what Jean-Francois Revel formulated as the first rule of the academy: “The Left may sometimes be wrong, but the Right can never be right” (John O’Sullivan, *The President, the Pope, and the Prime Minis-*

cent scholarship has revealed a better understanding of the cast of characters in the gripping drama of the collapse of communism in Poland, especially the vital role Pope John Paul II and the indispensable contribution of President Reagan.<sup>3</sup>

This article examines similarities between John Paul II and President Reagan; their approaches to confronting communism; their meetings beginning in 1982; and the impact these two strategic leaders had on Poland during the decade 1979–1989.

### Similarities

At first glance, Pope John Paul II and President Reagan appear to be an unlikely pair: the mystical, philosophical, poetically inclined Polish Pope and the American movie actor, television and radio personality, and conservative politician. And yet, born nine years apart on different sides of the Atlantic, Reagan in 1911 in Illinois, and the Pope in 1920 in Wadowice, these two men were well matched to change history.

Both men were popular, athletic, and loved the outdoors. As men of the theater, both knew the power of words to change minds and hearts. As

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*ter: Three Who Changed the World* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2006), 326–327). See also Cal Thomas, “Liberals Can’t Give Right Credit,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (January 6, 2000): 14A [<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1683&dat=20000106&id=E7UaAAAIIBAJ&sjid=HjoEAAAIBAJ&pg=5421,710415>, accessed on 02.06.2014]. While “American audiences tend to be quite interested in the religious causes of the end of the Cold War—how John Paul’s visit to Poland began the erosion of communist control of Eastern Europe, etc. . . . Western Europeans . . . are intellectually resistant to any mention of God in this kind of context . . . European attitudes to Reagan have altered dramatically in the last twenty years. He’s now seen across the political spectrum as a formidable statesman whose contribution to the defeat of communism was massive and indispensable. The Left’s attempt in the 1990s to give Gorbachev rather than Reagan the principal credit for ending the Cold War has really evaporated. Gorbachev is still respected for his refusal to send in the tanks to preserve the Soviet empire. But he is no longer seen as a motor force of history. His reforms were the Soviet Union’s response to the pressures exerted on it . . . Gorbachev was an effect more than a cause: Without Reagan, no Gorbachev” (Kathryn Jean Lopez, “The President, the Pope, and the Prime Minister for All Seasons,” *National Review* (December 23, 2010) [<http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/255910/president-pope-and-prime-minister-all-seasons-kathryn-jean-lopez>, accessed on 13.03.2014].

<sup>3</sup> While the Catholic Church’s role in Poland’s emergence from Communist domination is clear, the pattern in other parts of the Soviet empire was much different, especially in countries like Romania and Bulgaria, where Eastern Orthodoxy is the predominant faith, and where the church hierarchy had often compiled a record of collaboration with Communist authorities and played little or no role in the actions which led to the collapse of the old order.

a young man, Reagan wrote short stories and drew pictures; the Pope wrote poetry and plays. As artists they paid close attention to script, character, and the shape of a story or play. They tried to see the thing whole, to get the big shape of things.<sup>4</sup> Both could creatively, and intuitively, quickly discern opportunities for bold action and had the firm resolve to pursue them. As charismatic leaders, both connected naturally with people. Optimism, serenity, and a disarming sense of humor characterized both men. Both staunchly supported the sanctity of human life and both have been called “great” because of the principles they lived by and their contribution to mankind.<sup>5</sup> Three areas, in particular, gave the Pope and the President an extraordinary amount of common ground: religious beliefs, views of communism, and assassination attempts made against them.

### *Religious Beliefs*

Faith was the center of Karol Wojtyła’s life. As priest, bishop, archbishop, cardinal, pope, and now saint, he dedicated his life to Christ. Wojtyła’s autobiographical reflections reveal significant aspects of his religious life. But a full and more profound understanding of the man is prevented by his sense of personal privacy and, above all, by his mysticism which made it impossible for him to describe his innermost religious experiences and for us to understand them.<sup>6</sup>

Also private about his faith, religious remarks can be found throughout Reagan’s papers and letters, so much so that spiritual convictions seem to have motivated every aspect of his life and career.<sup>7</sup> Reagan’s

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<sup>4</sup> Peggy Noonan, “Russia, the Big Picture,” *The Wall Street Journal* (April 2, 2014) [<http://blogs.wsj.com/peggynoonan/2014/04/02/russia-the-big-picture/>, accessed on 02.04.2014].

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Reagan, *Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1984), the first book ever written by a sitting President and the first U.S. President who was unashamedly pro-life. Reagan and Pope John Paul II embodied the political greatness that Aristotle summed up in Book Six of his *Nicomachean Ethics* as the ability to translate wisdom into action on behalf of the public good which requires a combination of moral virtue, practical wisdom, and public spiritedness. See Steven F. Hayward, *Greatness: Reagan, Churchill & the Making of Extraordinary Leaders* (New York: Crown Forum, 2005), 17.

<sup>6</sup> The controversial decision to publish Pope John Paul II’s personal notes despite his explicit instructions to burn them was based on the belief that “they are the key to interpreting his spirituality” (“Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz on Publication of Blessed John Paul II’s Personal Notes” [<http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/cardinal-stanislaw-dziwisz-on-publication-of-bless-ed-john-paul-ii-s-personal-notes>, accessed on 24.02.2014]).

<sup>7</sup> James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War* (New York: Viking, 2009), 89–90 and Paul Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), x, 175. “[I]t’s impossible to understand Ronald Reagan fully—and especially

father, an apathetic Roman Catholic, left the religious upbringing of their children to his wife, a deeply evangelical Christian woman.<sup>8</sup> Even though raised as a Protestant, the very spiritual, God-fearing Reagan displayed an affinity for Catholics. As President, when fighting atheistic communism, he surrounded himself with decidedly, serious Catholics: CIA director William Casey, Secretary of State Alexander Haig, U.N. Ambassador Vernon Walters and, most importantly, Reagan's first two national security advisers, Richard Allen and William Clark.<sup>9</sup> Clark, closer to Reagan than anyone who knew the man with the exception of Mrs. Reagan, became Reagan's closest spiritual partner and the two men frequently prayed together.<sup>10</sup>

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his Cold War actions—without grasping the influence of religion on his thought . . . From all evidence it appears that Ronald Reagan's faith peaked in intensity at the bookends of his life—during his youth in Dixon, and again in his mature years as president and former president of the United States" (Id., xiii, 3). "Yes, I do have a deeply felt relationship with Christ . . . I have come to realize that whatever I do has meaning only if I ask that it serve his purpose . . . I have long believed there was a divine plan that placed this land here to be found by people of a special kind and that we have a rendezvous with destiny" (Letter circa 1976 to Dorothy D. Conaghan, in Ronald Reagan, *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, eds. Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson (New York: Free Press, 2003), 256).

<sup>8</sup> Ronald Reagan, *An American Life: Ronald Reagan* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 32. As a Protestant who married a Catholic, Reagan's mother, Nelle, was supposed to promise to raise her children Catholic, but her husband knowing her temperament conveniently forgot to secure her agreement. She reluctantly agreed to have Reagan's older brother Neil baptized in the Catholic Church, but by the time Ronald was born Nelle stiffened her religious spine and decided he would be brought up to make his own decisions regarding religion. See Ron Reagan, *My Father at 100: A Memoir* (New York: Viking, 2011), 50–51. Neil claimed his father was so lacking in outward faith that he didn't know his father was Catholic until he was almost 18 years old. See Anne Edwards, *Early Reagan: The Rise to Power* (New York: Morrow, 1987), 33–39, 58. Reagan's daughter, Patti, made the point that Reagan's father, Jack, an unsuccessful salesman with a serious drinking problem, did not provide the unwavering stability his son Ronald needed: "He couldn't really rely on his father" (Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan*, 8). Reagan found in God a reliable, paternal figure.

<sup>9</sup> O'Sullivan, *The President, the Pope, and the Prime Minister*, 176. O'Sullivan considered Reagan "culturally a Catholic" (Id.). Reagan's belief system was distinctively Christian and more particularly a general Protestantism, but one that was very open to consultation with Catholics. "You realize of course that you'll be reading the lines of a Protestant even though the son of a Catholic father. But I assure you that latter point means that I haven't even a tinge of religious prejudice" (Letter of March 5, 1987 to William A. Wilson, in Reagan, *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 120). Jane Wyman, Ronald Reagan's first wife, converted to Catholicism in 1953. She and their two children were baptized into the Catholic faith. See Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan*, 50.

*Communism*

Karol Wojtyła experienced the nightmare of living under repressive regimes—the Nazis and the Communists. His philosophical, theological, and papal writings, and two of the most important documents he secured passage of at the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (*Joy and Hope*) and a new Declaration on Religious Freedom known as *Dignitatis Humanae*, reflected Wojtyła’s deepest beliefs and urged the church to make its arguments through “the power of arguments” rather than by “moralization or exhortation.” *Gaudium et Spes* affirmed that nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in Christian hearts. In *Dignitatis Humanae*, the council declared that “the right to religious freedom has its very foundation in the dignity of the human person, as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself.”<sup>11</sup> Throughout his papacy Pope John Paul II stressed the basic tenets of Catholic social thought: the limited role of the state; the principle of subsidiarity; the obligations to the common good as tempered by recognition of the transcendence of the individual; and, above all, the importance of religious liberty which denies the state the right to direct hearts and minds in having the freedom to respond to dictates of religious truth.

Modern Polish history provided Wojtyła an extremely important lesson regarding totalitarianism: it was through its culture—language, literature, religion—that Poland survived despite having been erased for 123 years (1795–1918) from the political map of Europe. Wojtyła learned that

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Kengor, “Ronald Reagan and the Cold War: Catholic Ties Helped Reagan Triumph Over USSR,” *National Catholic Reporter* (July 2, 2004): 22. According to Nancy Reagan, her husband “prayed a great deal,” “wherever” he was and “whatever” he was doing (Peggy Noonan, *When Character Was King: A Story of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 98). William Clark, so devout in his faith that he built a chapel on his property in California, has been characterized as “the most impressive advisor within the White House inner circle,” “the only person in the entire two terms who had any kind of spiritual intimacy with the President,” and the one “who did more than any other individual to help the President change the course of history and put an end to an empire that was, indeed, ‘the embodiment of evil’” (Paul Kengor and Patricia Doerner, *The Judge: William P. Clark, Ronald Reagan’s Top Hand* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007), 10, 17, 71–74, 84–85; for Clark’s chapel, see 14–15, 329–334). Due to Clark’s close relationship with Reagan (“Judge Clark was Ronald Reagan’s only real friend and soul-mate . . . These two men operated on the same wavelength for thirty years.”), T.C. Reed maintained that “Clark’s biographers have given us the only correct history of Reagan’s SDI decision, of covert actions that worked and of Reagan’s unique determination to end—and win—the Cold War” (Id., dust jacket).

<sup>11</sup> As quoted by Joseph Shattan, *Architects of Victory: Six Heroes of the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation, 1999), 193.

overwhelming material force could be resisted successfully through the human spirit—through culture—and that culture remains the most enduring factor in human affairs throughout history. Against the Nazis, Wojtyła participated in a host of cultural resistance groups and, as a priest and bishop in Krakow, he employed a similar “culture-first” strategy to resist the Communist effort to rewrite Poland’s history and redefine and control Poland’s culture.<sup>12</sup>

As for Ronald Reagan, when World War II ended, and after serving four years in the U.S. Army, he returned to civilian life as an actor. He began taking a closer look at some of the liberal film and arts organizations he had joined. One of these groups, the Hollywood Independent Citizens Committee of the Arts, Sciences, and Professions, was being taken over by Communists as part of a Soviet-led effort to gain control of Hollywood’s film industry.<sup>13</sup> Reagan supported Congressional investigations of Hollywood Communists during the 1950’s. And a U.S. Government decision to interfere in the Hollywood studio system led him to understand that, nearly always, big government also was part of the problem. This was true even in the United States—not because the government brutally oppressed the very people it claimed to be serving as in Central and Eastern Europe, but because the U.S. federal bureaucracy, Reagan maintained, “was becoming so powerful [that] it was able to set policy and thwart the desires . . . of ordinary citizens.” The federal bureaucracy began leading America down the path to a silent form of socialism.<sup>14</sup> Reagan studied communism, read Marx, read the American Founders and conservative philosophers from Edmund Burke to James Burnham.<sup>15</sup> As a result, Reagan abandoned his

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<sup>12</sup> George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999) and *The End and the Beginning: Pope John Paul II: The Victory for Freedom, the Last Years, the Legacy* (New York: Random House, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Reagan, *An American Life*, 111–114. While president of the Screen Actors Guild in Hollywood, Reagan faced physical intimidation, including threats he would be splashed with acid to ruin his Hollywood career. He began carrying a gun and wearing it until he went to bed. See Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan*, 54.

<sup>14</sup> Reagan, *An American Life*, 119–120, 129.

<sup>15</sup> Peggy Noonan “Thanks From a Grateful Country,” June 7, 2004 [http://reagan2020.us/tributes/noonan\_1.asp, accessed on 09.06.2014]. Reagan “did not dislike intellectuals—his heroes often were intellectuals, from the Founders straight through Milton Friedman and Hayek and Solzhenitsyn. But he did not favor the intellectuals of his own day, because he thought they were in general thick-headed. He thought that many of the 20th century’s intellectuals were high-IQ dimwits. He had an instinctive agreement with Orwell’s putdown that a particular idea was so stupid that only an intellectual would believe it” (Id.).

liberalism and became a conservative. He extolled the virtues of limited government and the benefits of private enterprise.<sup>15</sup>

In Hollywood, and afterwards as governor of California, Reagan narrated several radio broadcasts on Poland's persecution by the Soviets and the Katyn Massacre.<sup>17</sup> He (along with Karol Wojtyła) viewed the 1945 Yalta Agreement as unjust. He saw no reason why America should not seek to free Poland—a nation of brave, religious people—from totalitarianism. In a July 1961 speech, Reagan contended that the “ideological struggle with Russia” was “the number one problem in the world.” He criticized those who maintained that the U.S. is at peace and should make no overt move to endanger that peace. He declared that “[w]e are at war and we are losing that war simply because we don't, or won't, realize that we are in it.”<sup>18</sup> Four years before becoming president, Reagan told his future National Security Advisor, Richard Allen: “Dick, my idea of American policy toward the Soviet Union is simple, and some would say simplistic. It is this: We win and they lose. What do you think of that?”<sup>19</sup>

#### *Assassination Attempts*

In only the third month of his presidency, on March 30, 1981, President Reagan was shot while leaving a Washington hotel. At the hospital, doctors determined that a bullet had pierced one of his lungs. It just missed his heart. Known for his sense of humor, Reagan told one of the surgeons who was about to operate on him, “I hope you're a Republican.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Reagan's letter of July 4, 1969 to Hugh Hefner, in Reagan, *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 146–149. Hollywood films may have influenced Reagan's sense of what it is to be an American and an American president. See Peggy Noonan, *What I Saw at the Revolution: A Political Life in the Reagan Era* (New York: Random House, 1990), 156–159.

<sup>17</sup> Kengor and Doerner, *The Judge*, 294 and “Katyn Massacre,” Global Museum of Communism [<http://www.globalmuseumonCommunism.org/videos/452>, accessed on 26.02.2014]. See also Ronald Reagan, *Reagan, In His Own Hand: The Writings of Ronald Reagan that Reveal His Revolutionary Vision for America*, ed. with an introduction and commentary by Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, Martin Anderson (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 31–33.

<sup>18</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Encroaching Government Controls,” *Human Events* (July 21, 1961): 457.

<sup>19</sup> Shattan, *Architects of Victory*, 245.

<sup>20</sup> Reagan, *An American Life*, 261; Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, ed. Douglas Brinkley (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 12. Reagan's daughter Patti in describing her visit to the hospital immediately after the shooting wrote that her father saw something—God or an angel. Reagan saw figures in white standing around him at the same time that he asked his wife whether he was alive, despite the fact that all the doctors and nurses were wearing green

Just six weeks later, on May 13, 1981, a trained assassin shot Pope John Paul II in Saint Peter's Square in Rome. Although the two bullets narrowly missed his abdominal aorta, spinal column, and every major nerve cluster, he lost nearly three-fourths of his blood. The Pope survived, but underwent five hours of surgery to treat his wounds.<sup>21</sup> That same day the Pope received a cable from Reagan in which the U.S. President expressed his shock and prayers.

Did the attempted assassinations change history? Although John Paul II believed Our Lady of Fatima helped save his life, this most likely did not affect his policies or Vatican diplomacy toward the Soviet Union. His call for religious freedom and human rights in the Eastern bloc and his support for Solidarity in Poland were in place two years before the attempted assassination, and did not change significantly thereafter.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, Reagan was changed within moments of his shooting. While in the hospital, he told his daughter, Maureen, that God

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scrubs. See Nancy Reagan, *My Turn: The Memoirs of Nancy Reagan* (New York: Random House, 1989), 90.

<sup>21</sup> When he briefly gained consciousness before being operated on, Pope John Paul II instructed the doctors not to remove his brown scapular during the operation. The Pope maintained that Our Lady of Fatima helped keep him alive throughout his ordeal. A young pilgrim in St. Peter's Square held up an image of the Virgin Mary, and the Pope, by leaning forward to see it better at just the moment Mehmet Ali Agca fired, may have ensured that the bullet missed the point on his body where it was aimed. "Could I forget that the event in St. Peter's Square took place on the day and at the hour when the first appearance of the Mother of Christ to the poor little peasants has been remembered for over sixty years at Fatima, Portugal? For in everything that happened to me on that very day, I felt that extraordinary motherly protection and care, which turned out to be stronger than the deadly bullet" (Pope John Paul II, *Memory & Identity* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), 184). See also "The Pope of Our Lady of Fatima" [<http://www.michaeljournal.org/popefatima.htm>, accessed on 24.02.2014]. A second assassination attempt took place on May 12, 1982, just a day before the anniversary of the first attempt on his life, in Fatima, Portugal, when a man tried to stab John Paul II with a bayonet. The Pope suffered a non-life threatening wound. "Pope John Paul Stabbed by Priest," *The Telegraph* (October 15, 2008) [<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/3203594/Pope-John-Paul-stabbed-by-priest.html>, accessed on 26.02.2014].

<sup>22</sup> John O'Sullivan, "Of Providence and Policy: Three Assassination Attempts Failed, and an Evil Empire Fell," *National Review* 58:22 (December 4, 2006): 41. Margaret Thatcher, who was closely aligned with the Cold War policies of President Reagan based on a strong distrust of communism, also narrowly escaped injury in an Irish Republican Army assassination attempt at a Brighton hotel early in the morning on October 12, 1984 that killed five people. BBC News, On This Day 12 October, "1984: Tory Cabinet in Brighton Bomb Blast" [[http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/october/12/newsid\\_2531000/2531583.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/october/12/newsid_2531000/2531583.stm), accessed on 21.02.2014].



had spared his life for a purpose. Two weeks later, he wrote in his journal: “Whatever happens now I owe my life to God and will try to serve Him in every way I can.”<sup>23</sup> In terms of policy, that did not mean any great change of direction. Reagan had just arrived at the White House and few policies had been established. But Reagan’s being shot did strengthen his determination to pursue policies that he favored despite opposition from the Democrats, the government bureaucracy, and even some within his own political party. Ultimately, Reagan would conclude that the great purpose for which God had spared him was to hasten the collapse of communism.<sup>24</sup>

Reagan’s sense of purpose was reaffirmed in June 1981. He, his wife, and a few guests had a private meal with Mother Teresa who said to the President: “Mr. President Reagan, do you know that we stayed up for two straight nights praying for you after you were shot? We prayed very hard for you to live.” Then during the meal, she looked at Reagan and said: “You have suffered the passion of the cross and have received grace. There is a purpose to this . . . This has happened to you at this time because your country and the world need you.” Reagan was practically speechless and Mrs. Reagan dissolved into tears.<sup>25</sup>

## Approaches to Communism

### *Papal Soft Power*

Poland’s Communist authorities, their masters in Moscow, and their allies throughout the Soviet bloc long had regarded Karol Wojtyla as a deadly enemy. After his election as Pope in 1978, they saw him as a mor-

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<sup>23</sup> Reagan, *An American Life*, 263. Four days later, on Good Friday, Reagan met with Terence Cardinal Cooke in the White House where the cardinal told him, “The hand of God was upon you.” Reagan grew very serious and replied: “I know. I have decided that whatever time I have left is left for Him” (Id.).

<sup>24</sup> O’Sullivan, *The President, the Pope, and the Prime Minister*, 87 and note 68 below. Reagan told Michael Deaver, his White House Deputy Chief of Staff, “You know, since I’ve been shot, I think I’m going to rely more on my own instincts than other people’s. There’s a reason I’ve been saved” (Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan*, 200).

<sup>25</sup> Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan*, 208–209. In a June 4, 1981, entry in his diary, Reagan wrote that Mother Teresa “radiates joy because God, as she says, has given her the opportunity to serve the lepers, the poverty stricken & the hopeless.” On June 13, 1986, Reagan wrote, “Mother Teresa dropped by for a brief visit & to tell me she prayed for me every day. She’s a most remarkable little woman” (Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 23, 419). Reagan “was raised to believe that God has a plan for everyone and that seemingly random twists of fate are all a part of His plan” (Reagan, *An American Life*, 20). Likewise, Karol Wojtyla was

tal threat not only to communism in Central and Eastern Europe but also to the very survival of communism itself.<sup>26</sup> John Paul II's papacy would prove to justify most of those fears. His pilgrimage to Poland beginning on June 2, 1979, is regarded as the beginning of the spiritual and psychological earthquake that provoked the fall of Eastern European communism.<sup>27</sup> In Warsaw's Victory Square, Pope John Paul II gave what some consider the greatest sermon of his life.<sup>28</sup> He did not directly challenge the government.

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convinced that there are no mere coincidences in the world just aspects of God's providence we do not yet grasp. Weigel, *The End and the Beginning*, 33.

<sup>26</sup> Since 1971, the KGB had targeted Wojtyla for surveillance as one suspected of subversion. The Communists knew that Christian religious belief and practice were on a permanent collision course with totalitarianism, which is why they persecuted it everywhere they could. They understood, in short, that the chief enemies of the state were those who did not believe the state had the authority to make the ultimate moral and political decisions. It is a remarkable and enduring and deplorable irony that over twenty years after the end of the Cold War itself, many Western intellectuals and pundits and other designated authorities still did not understand or acknowledge any of this.

<sup>27</sup> Local witnesses stressed this point: "[W]hen I first began to research this question in 1990, Poles, Czechs, and Slovaks, religious and secular alike, were unanimous in their testimony about the crucial impact of June 1979. That, they insisted, was when '1989' started" (George Weigel's 2000 Templeton Lecture on Religion and World Affairs, "Pope John Paul II and the Dynamics of History," *Watch on the West: A Newsletter of Foreign Policy Research Institute's Center for the Study of America and the West* 1:6 (April 2000) [<http://www.fpri.org/ww/0106.200004.weigel.popehistory.html>, accessed on 27.02.2014]. Jerzy Turowicz knew Karol Wojtyla when they were young men together; he later became a supporter of Solidarity and member of Poland's first post-communist government. "Mr. Turowicz, remembering Blonie Field and the Pope's visit, told Ray Flynn, at the time U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, 'Historians say World War II ended in 1945. Maybe in the rest of the world, but not in Poland. They say communism fell in 1989. Not in Poland. World War II and communism both ended in Poland at the same time—in 1979, when John Paul II came home'" (Peggy Noonan, *John Paul the Great: Remembering a Spiritual Father* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2005), 34). The West largely missed the significance of the event as evidenced by the *New York Times*: "As much as the visit of Pope John Paul II to Poland must reinvigorate and reinspire the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, it does not threaten the political order of the nation or of Eastern Europe" (*New York Times* editorial of June 5, 1979). But two other Slavic observers of the times were not at all confused: Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Yuri Andropov both knew that the rise of John Paul II and the deployment of his "culture-first" strategy of social change was a profound threat to the Soviet order. See Weigel, "Pope John Paul II and the Dynamics of History." After Wojtyla was elected Pope, an Italian journalist commented that Moscow "would prefer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn as Secretary General of the United Nations than a Pole as pope" (Weigel, *The End and the Beginning*, 100).

<sup>28</sup> Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 293. The Communists did understand the threat that John Paul II's pilgrimage posed: "Two months before the Pope's arrival, the Polish Communist apparatus took steps to restrain the enthusiasm of the people. They sent a secret directive to school-teachers explaining how they should understand and explain the Pope's visit. 'The Pope is

He did not call for an uprising or tell the Poles to push back against their atheist masters. He did not speak of what governments want, what a freedom movement wants, or what the Polish workers' unions wanted. He spoke of what God wants. He declared that "Christ will never agree to man being viewed only as a means of production;" he urged Poles to follow an "inner truth" and avoid conformity; he spoke of the right to self-determination and integrity; and he called for Slavic solidarity in the face of an unnamed, common enemy. His message "Be not afraid!" transmitted to his countrymen, would resonate throughout the world.<sup>29</sup>

A week later on June 10, 1979, in Krakow's Blonie Field, one of the greatest spiritual moments of the 20th century occurred. The Pope continued the theme of his pilgrimage that without Christ it is impossible to understand the history of Poland. "Those who oppose Christ," he said, "still live within the Christian context of history." Christ, the Pope declared, was not only the past of Poland—he was "the future . . . our Polish future." The crowd thundered its response: "We want God!" The millions of Poles at Blonie Field went home transformed. They compared the reality they witnessed with their own eyes and ears with the propaganda their media reported, with television broadcasts carefully not showing the huge crowds. The people of Poland could definitively say: "It's all lies. Everything this government says is a lie. Everything the government is is a lie."<sup>30</sup>

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our enemy,' it said. 'Due to his uncommon skills and great sense of humor he is dangerous, because he charms everyone, especially journalists. Besides, he goes for cheap gestures in his relations with the crowd, for instance, puts on a highlander's hat, shakes all hands, kisses children . . . It is modeled on American presidential campaigns . . . Because of the activation of the church in Poland our activities designed to atheize the youth not only cannot diminish but must intensely develop . . . In this respect all means are allowed and we cannot afford any sentiments.' The government also issued instructions to Polish media to censor and limit the Pope's comments and appearances" (Noonan, *John Paul the Great*, 25–26).

<sup>29</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Homily of His Holiness John Paul II, Victory Square, Warsaw, 2 June 1979," John Paul II Foundation [<http://www.fjp2.com/us/multimedia/60-apostolic-journey-to-the-poland-1979/16074-homily-in-warsaw-june-2-1979>, accessed on 21.02.2014]. For an account of the Pope's entire pilgrimage, see Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 305–323. When Cap Weinberger, Reagan's Secretary of Defense was on his deathbed, Bill Clark phoned to say goodbye; he shared with Weinberger the famous words of Christ that Pope John Paul II echoed in 1979, "Be not afraid," before telling Weinberger that he was going to a better place. See Kengor and Doerner, *The Judge*, 352.

<sup>30</sup> "[W]hen 10 million Poles said it was over in Poland, it was over in Eastern Europe. And when it was over in Eastern Europe, it was over in the Soviet Union. And when it was over in the Soviet Union, well, it was over" (Noonan, *John Paul the Great*, 34). The Pope's 1987 pilgrimage to Chile in 1987 and to Cuba in 1998 deployed similar strategies: a reconstituting of those civil societies through reclamation of their Christian culture.

The Pope's nine-day visit to Poland reinvigorated the Catholic faith of his countrymen. It repeatedly reminded them of their true identity and began to shift the boundaries of the world. The Pope's approach pointed out the obvious: We are Christians, we are here, and we are united, no matter what the Communists and their map-makers say.<sup>31</sup>

After the Pope's visit, Poland's domestic opposition, traditionally divided, emerged relatively united. Even the intellectual dissidents suspicious of the church's role acknowledged the power of the Pope's themes.<sup>32</sup> One year later in 1980, intellectuals, workers, and believers came together in a series of mass strikes. This led to the formation of Solidarity, the first overtly anti-communist institution established in a Communist country.

### *Hard Power*

Reagan paid careful attention to the extraordinary effect of the Pope's 1979 trip to Poland. In one of his radio broadcasts, prior to announcing his candidacy for the Republican nomination for president, Reagan blasted the "'Communitistic atheism' that had preyed on Poland." Reagan asked, "Will the Kremlin ever be the same again? Will any of us for that matter? Perhaps that one man—the son of simple farm folk has made us aware that the world is crying out for a spiritual revival and for leadership."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> "[W]e human beings, we Poles, each of whom was born as a human being of the flesh (cf. Jn 3:6) and blood of his parents, have been conceived and born of the Spirit (cf. Jn 3:5) . . . So, before going away, I beg you once again to accept the whole of the spiritual legacy which goes by the name of 'Poland,' with the faith, hope and charity that Christ poured into us at our holy Baptism" (Pope John Paul II, "Homily of His Holiness John Paul II, Krakow, 10 June 1979" [[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/homilies/1979/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19790610\\_polonia-cracovia-blonia-k\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790610_polonia-cracovia-blonia-k_en.html)], accessed on 27.02.2014).

<sup>32</sup> Shattan, *Architects of Victory*, 193. Before World War II, the Catholic Church insisted that all true Poles had to be Catholic. This disenfranchised many and generated little support among Polish intellectuals. By 1970 the church refused to confine its demands to strictly "Catholic" issues. Instead it became the leading advocate of the rights of all Poles and the most outspoken champion of this new approach was Cardinal Karol Wojtyła. In 1976, he preached: "We are all Poland, all of us believers and unbelievers . . . There is only one road to peace and national unity, and that is through unfettered respect for the rights of man, for the rights of citizens and Poles" (Id., 194–195). See Damon Linker, "John Paul II, Intellectual," *Policy Review* 103 (October 1, 2000) [<http://www.hoover.org/publications/policy-review/article/6912>], accessed on 24.02.2014] and Chantal Delsol, *The Unlearned Lessons of the Twentieth Century*, trans. Robin Dick (Delaware: ISI Books, 2006), 98–102, 193–195.

<sup>33</sup> Ronald Reagan's June 29, 1979 broadcasts, "The Pope in Poland," and "A Tale of Two Countries," in Reagan, *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, 174–177.

After the Pope's visit to Poland, Reagan was never the same. It is possible that, at the same time, both these men, who had never met but whose lives and leadership would soon be entwined, came to the same strategic conclusion: the Communist emperor had far fewer clothes than previously imagined. A few months after Reagan came to the White House in 1981, he wrote: "I have had a feeling, particularly in view of the Pope's visit to Poland, that religion might very well turn out to be the Soviets' Achilles' heel."<sup>34</sup> From the beginning of his presidency, Reagan understood that the rise of Solidarity represented a major threat to Moscow and a major opportunity for the West. "This was what we had been waiting for since World War II," Reagan wrote in his autobiography. "What was happening in Poland might spread like a contagion throughout Eastern Europe."<sup>35</sup>

We tend to forget that during his presidency, Reagan's assessments of communism resonated with Pope John Paul II's teachings. Reagan quoted the Pope when speaking at a Polish festival in Pennsylvania and later at a White House luncheon marking the fortieth anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising: "Freedom is given to man by God as a measure of his dignity . . . As children of God, we cannot be slaves."<sup>36</sup> In an earlier speech, Reagan elaborated on this point:

That's why the Marxist vision of man without God must eventually be seen as an empty and a false faith—the second oldest in the world—first proclaimed in the Garden of Eden with whispered words of temptation: 'Ye shall be as gods.' The crisis of the Western world . . . exists to the degree in which it is indifferent to God. The Western world does not know it but it already possesses the answer to this problem—but only provided that its faith in God and the

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<sup>34</sup> Letter of July 9, 1981, to John O. Koehler, in Reagan, *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 375. See Weigel, "The President and The Pope," *National Review Online* (April 2, 2005) [<http://m.nationalreview.com/articles/214067/president-and-pope/george-weigel>, accessed on 02.04.2014].

<sup>35</sup> Reagan, *An American Life*, 301. Both Reagan and Clark believed that Poland was the key to breaking the Soviet grip on Eastern and Central Europe. See Kengor and Doerner, *The Judge*, 170.

<sup>36</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at a White House Luncheon Marking the 40th Anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising," August 17, 1984 [<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/81784b.htm>, accessed on 02.01.2014], and Reagan, "Remarks at a Polish Festival," Doylestown, Pennsylvania, September 9, 1984 [<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/90984a.htm>, accessed on 02.01.2014].

freedom He enjoins is as great as communism's faith in man. This is the real task before us: to reassert our commitment as a nation to a law higher than our own, to renew our spiritual strength. Only by building a wall of such spiritual resolve can we, as a free people, hope to protect our own heritage and make it someday the birthright of all men.<sup>37</sup>

Shortly after becoming President, Reagan wrote Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev asking him to join in shaping a lasting peace for people on both sides of the Iron Curtain. After Brezhnev's polemical response blaming the United States for the Cold War, Reagan understood that the Communists would have to be brought to the point of defeat before they would consider compromise. From then on, Reagan remained open to dialogue but developed and executed a strategy of economic and military competition intended to compete the Soviets into bankruptcy. Only then would they be ready to make the compromises that signaled a genuine peace.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at the Conservative Political Action Conference, Washington, D.C., March 20, 1981," in *Speaking My Mind: Selected Speeches* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 99.

<sup>38</sup> "I really don't trust the Soviets, and I don't really believe that they will join us in a legitimate limitation of arms agreement" (Reagan, *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 399). On March 26, 1982, President Ronald Reagan made the following entry in his diary: "Briefing on Soviet economy. They are in very bad shape and if we can cut off their credit they'll have to yell 'Uncle' or starve" (Reagan, *An American Life*, 316). In the first months of his presidency, Reagan was convinced that "[t]he great dynamic success of capitalism had given us a powerful weapon in our battle against communism—money. The Russians could never win the arms race; we could outspend them forever. Moreover, incentives inherent in the capitalist system had given us an industrial base that meant we had the capacity to maintain a technological edge over them forever" (Id., 267). Reagan pursued his strategy without much concern for politics: "If this is what the Lord would have me do, then we will find that out, and maybe it should be someone who has no political ambition, who is at an age where he can do what he thinks should be done without worrying about the votes in the next election" (Letter of June 19, 1979 to Ed Langley, in Reagan, *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 229). Peter Schweizer was the first scholar to demonstrate that Ronald Reagan deliberately set out to win the Cold War. In two books—*Victory: The Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy That Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994) and *Reagan's War: The Epic Story of His Forty-Year Struggle and Final Triumph Over Communism* (New York: Doubleday, 2002)—"Schweizer cited interviews with some of Reagan's national security and foreign policy staffers, national security directives, Reagan's speeches and private correspondence, and documents from several foreign countries, to argue that Reagan intentionally abandoned detente, moved beyond a passive containment policy, and pursued a strategy of victory" (Francis P. Sempa, "Ronald Reagan and the End of the Cold War,"

On May 17, 1981, Reagan gave the first public hint of his new strategy in a speech at the University of Notre Dame. He said: “The West won’t contain communism, it will transcend communism. It will dismiss it as some bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages are even now being written.”<sup>39</sup> Two years later, Reagan described the Soviet Union as an “evil empire” and went on to say: “I’ve always maintained that the struggle now going on for the world will never be decided by bombs or rockets, by armies or military might. The real crisis we face today is a spiritual one.”<sup>40</sup> Reagan hated communism not only because it oppressed people economically and politically, but also because it oppressed people spiritually.<sup>41</sup> Despite criticism from experts and advisors, Reagan ploughed on with his defiant truth-telling. He believed that the great purpose for which he had been spared by God did not include sugarcoating the reality of totalitarianism.<sup>42</sup>

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*American Diplomacy* (March 13, 2007) [[http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2007/0103/book/book\\_sempa03.html](http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2007/0103/book/book_sempa03.html), accessed on 26.02.2014].

<sup>39</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Address at University of Notre Dame,” May 17, 1981 [<http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/speech-5854>, accessed on 26.07.2014]. See also Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals,” Orlando, Florida, March 8, 1983, in Reagan, *Speaking My Mind*, 180.

<sup>40</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Evil Empire Speech,” March 8, 1983 [<http://www.nationalcenter.org/ReaganEvilEmpire1983.html>, accessed on 24.02.2014]. “I had always believed that, as an economic system, communism was doomed. Not only was it lacking in the free market incentives that motivated people to work hard and excel—the economic propulsion that had brought such prosperity to America—but history was full of examples showing that any totalitarian state that deprived its people of liberty and freedom of choice was ultimately doomed. The Bolshevik revolution had simply replaced an inherited aristocracy with a self-appointed one, the Soviet leadership, and it, like its predecessor, could not survive against the inherent drive of all men and women to be free” (Reagan, *An American Life*, 237).

<sup>41</sup> Michael Reagan, *The New Reagan Revolution*, 194–195.

<sup>42</sup> “At the time, however, Reagan seemed intellectually isolated. Henry Steele Commager, a distinguished presidential historian who claimed to have read every presidential address, called the ‘evil empire’ speech the worst in history. The Soviets called it ‘lunatic anti-communism.’ Allies were either silent or condemned Reagan’s ‘megaphone diplomacy’” (O’Sullivan, *The President, the Pope, and the Prime Minister*, 89). Even Nancy Reagan and her friend Stuart Spencer, a Reagan campaign advisor, objected to the evil empire speech. See Paul Kengor, *The Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism* (Harper-Collins, 2006), 175. But Reagan understood the Soviet Union far better than the so-called experts who denounced him for refusing to buy the liberal dogma of a nuclear freeze, unilateral disarmament, and accommodation with the Soviets. See Andrew Nagorski, “Reagan Had It Right,” *Newsweek International* (Oct. 21, 2002): 68 [<http://www.newsweek.com/reagan-had-it-right-146237>, accessed on 27.05.2014]. Reagan’s reading of Whittaker Cham-

When Poland's Communist government arrested Solidarity's leaders and imposed martial law on December 13, 1981, Reagan was furious. Just one day later, he called the Pope to discuss the situation and said he looked forward to a time when the two could meet. "We can't let this revolution against communism fail without our offering a hand," Reagan wrote in his diary. "We may never have an opportunity like this in our lifetime."<sup>43</sup> In the first hours of the crisis, Reagan ordered that the Pope receive up-to-date and relevant American intelligence, including reports and analysis from Colonel Ryszard Kuklinski, a senior member of the Polish general staff and a CIA informant who courageously warned the U.S. that the Soviets were prepared to invade if the Polish government did not impose martial law.<sup>44</sup>

To express his anger over human rights violations in Poland, Reagan imposed a host of sanctions against both Poland and the Soviet Union. His strategy to squeeze the "evil empire" consisted of five pillars: 1) financial—providing covert financial (and intelligence support) to Solidarity and other forces opposing communist regimes; 2) political/economic—cooperating with Saudi Arabia to drive down the price of oil to reduce Soviet hard currency earnings, among many other forms of economic warfare intended to cripple the Soviet economy; 3) military—initiating a massive U.S. defense buildup aimed at outspending Moscow and bringing the Soviets to the negotiating table, including via the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI); 4) ideological—advocating free market incentives as motivating people to work hard and excel, or as Reagan quipped: "Socialism only works in two places: Heaven where they don't need it and hell where they already have it,"<sup>45</sup> and, 5) moral—proclaiming that atheistic

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bers' book *Witness* (New York: Random House, 1952) most likely contributed to his characterization of communism as concentrated evil. See Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan*, 75–88.

<sup>43</sup> Reagan, *An American Life*, 301, 304; Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 55.

<sup>44</sup> Communist spies did manage to infiltrate the Pope's inner circle and Kuklinski may have been betrayed by a Soviet bloc spy inside the Vatican. See Francis Rooney, *The Global Vatican: An Inside Look at the Catholic Church, World Politics, and the Extraordinary Relationship between the United States and the Holy See* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 140–141. Reagan entertained the notion of using military force if Russia invaded Poland. See Kengor, *The Crusader*, 93–97.

<sup>45</sup> Steve Frank, "200 Ronald Reagan Quotations," Steve Frank's California Political News and Views [<http://capoliticalnews.com/2013/04/09/200-ronald-reagan-quotations/>, accessed on 26.02.2014]. Reagan had a great sense of humor: "How do you tell a communist? Well, it's someone who reads Marx and Lenin. And how do you tell an anti-communist? It's someone who understands Marx and Lenin" (Id.).



communism is living a lie that, when fully understood must ultimately fail.<sup>46</sup> As former Soviet officials later admitted, the Kremlin suddenly realized it was beyond their power to compete with Reagan.<sup>47</sup>

The full story has yet to be told, but it has been estimated that the U.S. alone covertly spent millions of dollars to keep Solidarity alive.<sup>48</sup> A successful revolution requires communication, so tons of equipment—fax machines, printing presses, transmitters, telephones, shortwave radios, video cameras, photocopiers, telex machines, computers, word processors—were smuggled into Poland via channels established by Catholic priests, American intelligence agents, and American and European labor movements. The U.S. embassy in Warsaw became the pivotal and most effective CIA station in the Communist world. Reagan discussed Poland with only his closest advisers; larger meetings were not considered leak proof. All of the major decisions on funneling aid to Solidarity and responding to the Polish and Soviet governments were made by Reagan, Casey, and Clark, often in consultation with John Paul II or (more specifically) his aides and liaisons, particularly Cardinal Pio Laghi, apostolic delegate to the United States.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Norman A. Bailey, *The Strategic Plan that Won the Cold War* (McLean, VA: The Potomac Foundation, 1998). Reagan's initiatives also were linked to his courageous and, at the time, stunning vision of a nuclear free world. He was, in fact, a nuclear abolitionist. No one seemed to encourage him except Pope John Paul II. Because of his large defense buildup, Reagan's critics considered him a warmonger and influenced the May 3, 1983 National Conference of Catholic Bishops' peace pastoral, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response, A Pastoral Letter on War and Peace* (Washington, D.C., United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Inc., 1983). They failed to see that Reagan was a true radical who wanted to eliminate nuclear arms. Likewise, the Soviets never bought the idea that Reagan was increasing America's nuclear arsenal only to reduce nuclear weapons. They thought the U.S. was preparing its own "first-strike" capability. Reagan feared war with the Soviets intensely, but remained convinced that a "peace through strength" approach was the best strategy for dealing with them. He believed building up the military and even talking tough would avoid confrontation and the need for war.

<sup>47</sup> Nagorski, "Reagan Had It Right." Bill Clark was Reagan's point man for the "economic dimension" of the strategy. See Kengor and Doerner, *The Judge*, 165. France strongly resisted Reagan's efforts to undermine the Soviet economy and concluded that Poland was doomed to continued communist rule. French President François Mitterrand vigorously stated, "[N]othing can happen in Poland. The very nature of the Communist movement will not allow anything to happen. If necessary, they will act brutally but it is impossible for them to allow the society to become liberal" (Id., 176–180).

<sup>48</sup> Fifty million dollars is a figure frequently cited, but it remains difficult to evaluate the precise nature and extent of financial aid provided to Solidarity which stems from "secret," "confidential," and "private" source material.

Just ten days after martial law was imposed, Reagan asked Americans during that Christmas season to light a candle in support of freedom in Poland. Two days earlier, the Polish Ambassador in Washington, Romuald Spasowski, and his wife met in private with the President. The Ambassador asked the President if he would light a candle and put it in the window for the people of Poland. Reagan immediately got up, lit a candle, and put it in the window of the White House dining room. Later, he escorted his guests in the rain to their car holding an umbrella over Mrs. Spasowska, as she wept on his shoulder.<sup>50</sup>

## Meetings

### *Face to Face Encounters*

President Reagan's first meeting with Pope John Paul II took place in the Vatican on June 7, 1982. Reagan's Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, prepared a report on topics on which the Vatican and U.S. might cooperate, including Poland. The report described the Pope as an admirer

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<sup>49</sup> Carl Bernstein, "The Holy Alliance," *Time* (February 24, 1992): 28–35 [[http://www.carlbernstein.com/magazine\\_holy\\_alliance.php](http://www.carlbernstein.com/magazine_holy_alliance.php), accessed on 25.05.2014]. "We were most active in Poland. We slowly increased our clandestine support of Solidarity, mainly by providing printing equipment and other means of communication to the underground. They were not told that C.I.A. was the source of the assistance, although there must have been suspicions . . . We provided a good deal of money and equipment for the Polish underground for this . . . I know that there was considerable sharing of information about developments in Poland with the Vatican . . . there were discussions at the highest level about the need to assist Solidarity" (Robert Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 450).

<sup>50</sup> "Let those candles remind us that these blessings [of freedom and abundance] bring with them a solid obligation, an obligation to the God who guides us, an obligation to the heritage of liberty and dignity handed down to us by our forefathers and an obligation to the children of the world whose future will be shaped by the way we live our lives today" (Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation About Christmas and the Situation in Poland," December 23, 1981 [<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1981/122381e.htm>, accessed on 15.02.2014]. A Marxist and patriotic Pole, Spasowski's faith in the Polish Communist regime wavered over time. The ascension of a Pole to the papacy served as the impetus for Spasowski's break with communism. See Romuald Spasowski, *The Liberation of One* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986). A day or two after the crackdown when Alexander Haig notified Reagan that Ambassador Spasowski wanted to defect immediately, Reagan forthwith "welcomed Spasowski and his family to America as genuine Polish patriots. Subsequently, Reagan learned that the generals who ruled Poland had sentenced Ambassador Spasowski to death." See Kengor, *The Crusader*, 100–101, and Reagan, *An American Life*, 303.

of American generosity, distrustful of the Soviets, and critical of America's wastefulness and materialism. Declassified sections of this report show close agreement between the Pope and Reagan on Poland, and their movement toward agreeing on Central America, and arms control. The two leaders remained alone for fifty minutes in the Vatican Library to pray together and talk about life.<sup>51</sup>

We have no record of their private discussion. According to Reagan's National Security Adviser, William Clark, the Pope and the President referred to the "miraculous" fact that they had survived assassination attempts and shared a spiritual view and vision of the Soviet empire, namely, "that right or correctness would ultimately prevail in the divine plan." Atheistic communism lived a lie that when fully understood would cause its own demise.<sup>52</sup> Reagan convinced the Pope he was sincerely committed to peace and disarmament and that these commitments, which were compatible with both Catholic values and Vatican interests, would shape his U.S. policy. A cardinal, who was one of the Pope's closest aides, elaborated:

Nobody believed the collapse of communism would happen this fast or on this timetable. But in their first meeting, the Holy Father and the President committed themselves and the institutions of the church and America to such a goal. And from that day, the focus was to bring it about in Poland.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 87; O'Sullivan, *The President, the Pope, and the Prime Minister*, 179–183.

<sup>52</sup> Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan*, 210–211; Kengor and Doerner, *The Judge*, 172–173.

<sup>53</sup> Bernstein, "The Holy Alliance." According to William Clark, "Reagan had an insatiable appetite for information on Poland . . . Often Reagan's first question at the daily briefing would be, 'What's happening in Poland?'" (Kengor, *The Crusader*, 134–135). Clark and William Casey frequently met secretly with Archbishop Pio Laghi, the apostolic delegate to Washington to share intelligence and brief him on the Reagan administration's positions. The existing records of these meetings remain classified. See Kengor and Doerner, *The Judge*, 172–174. Neither Reagan nor John Paul II, each convinced that communism could be defeated, came to high office with a detailed plan for victory. Both expected, in the late 1970s, that the struggle would continue beyond their lifetimes. See Weigel, "The President and The Pope." "I don't claim the vision to have foreseen in 1984 all the dramatic changes that came later to the Communist world. But the events in China and Poland made me feel optimistic; they were an exciting glimmer on the horizon, the first public admission in the Communist world that communism wasn't working . . . a harbinger of its collapse" (Reagan, *An American Life*, 372). Indeed "even as late as 1984, the Pope did not believe the Communist Polish government could be changed" (Mark Riebling, "Freedom's Men: The Cold War

Reagan met with the Pope three more times: briefly in Fairbanks, Alaska in May 1984, where each had a stopover while traveling and Reagan briefed the Pope on his recent trip to China;<sup>54</sup> at the Vatican in June 1987, where the President held an hour-long, one-on-one meeting with the Pope who was preparing an upcoming visit to Poland and where Reagan offered the Pope his impressions of Mikhail Gorbachev and U.S.-Soviet arms control negotiations;<sup>55</sup> and in September 1987, in Miami during the Pope's visit to the U.S. and Canada.<sup>56</sup>

Eventually, Reagan engaged in summit meetings and arms control negotiations with a reform-oriented Mikhail Gorbachev to manage the Cold War (and its end) peacefully.<sup>57</sup> Reagan's relationship with Gorbachev helped ensure the liberation of the peoples of Eastern and Central Europe from Soviet control during President George H.W. Bush's administration without violence, "without a shot being fired."<sup>58</sup> In February 1987, after

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team of Pope John Paul II and Ronald Reagan," *National Review* (April 4, 2005) [<http://old.nationalreview.com/comment/riebling200504040753.asp>, accessed on 27.02.2014]).

<sup>54</sup> Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 237. Reagan told the Alaskans that when in China he spoke of American exceptionalism. He "tried to explain what America is and who we are—to explain to them our faith in God and our love, our true love, for freedom." John Paul II was pleased when he learned of Reagan's spiritual message to the Chinese. Reagan publicly stated that "America was founded by people who sought freedom to worship God and to trust in Him to guide them in their daily lives" (Reagan, "Remarks to Chinese Community Leaders," Beijing, China, April 27, 1984 as cited by Kengor and Doerner, *The Judge*, 281–282). For an account of this "big speech" by the speechwriter, see Noonan, *What I Saw at the Revolution*, 79–83.

<sup>55</sup> Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 504.

<sup>56</sup> *Id.*, 529.

<sup>57</sup> Unlike Reagan and the Pope who had a destination in mind, Gorbachev had no such map—even at the end in 1991, he still hung on to the possibility of reform communism, a hybrid that Reagan and John Paul II deemed impossible. Weigel, *The End and the Beginning*, 185. Gaddis, the influential Cold War historian, carefully concluded that Reagan ended the Cold War by "changing rather than containing" the Soviet Union: "What one can say now is that Reagan saw Soviet weaknesses sooner than most of his contemporaries did; that he understood the extent to which detente was perpetuating the Cold War rather than hastening its end; that his hard line strained the Soviet system at the moment of its maximum weakness; that his shift toward conciliation preceded Gorbachev; that he combined reassurance, persuasion, and pressure in dealing with the new Soviet leader; and that he maintained the support of the American people and of American allies . . . Reagan's role here was critical" (John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 375).

<sup>58</sup> Prime Minister Thatcher, the Iron Lady, always gave the credit to Reagan. As she said in her eulogy to him in 2004, Reagan "had a higher claim than any other leader to have won the

the Polish government pledged to open a dialogue with the Catholic Church, Reagan lifted U.S. sanctions against Poland. Though not entirely democratic, the victory of anti-communist candidates in the election held in June 1989 paved the way for the creation of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's cabinet and a peaceful transition to democracy both in Poland and elsewhere.<sup>59</sup> Poland's first postwar democratic government came into being on September 12, 1989—exactly ten years and three months after Pope John Paul II landed in Warsaw and appealed to God: "Let Your Spirit come down and renew the face of the land—this land."<sup>60</sup>

### *A Holy Alliance?*

Some have maintained that following their first meeting in June 1982 Reagan and the Pope, acting on their compatible visions of global issues in the 1980s, shared intelligence and struck a deal, a "holy alliance," or clandestine campaign, in which the Pope promised silence on the installation of U.S. missiles in Europe or U.S. policy in Central America in return for Reagan's support in liberating Poland.<sup>61</sup>

We do know that secret U.S. assistance played an important role in Solidarity's survival and eventual triumph which was one of the turning

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Cold War for liberty—and he did it without a shot being fired" [<http://reagan2020.us/eulogies/thatcher.asp>, accessed on 05.06.2014]. Communism ended in 1991: in July, the Warsaw Pact was formally dissolved; on December 25, U.S. President George H. W. Bush, after receiving a phone call from Mikhail Gorbachev, delivered a Christmas Day speech acknowledging the end of the Cold War; on December 25, Gorbachev resigned as President of the USSR; on December 26, The Council of Republics of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR recognized the dissolution of the Soviet Union and decided to dissolve itself, and on December 31, all Soviet institutions ceased official operations.

<sup>59</sup> A few weeks before the elections, Reagan received a visit from two Solidarity members and two Polish Americans hosting the men. Chris Zawitkowski, one of the hosts, asked Reagan if he had any words of wisdom or encouragement for the two Solidarity members and was taken aback when Reagan said: "Listen to your conscience because that is where the Holy Spirit speaks to you" (Kengor, *The Crusader*, 286–287).

<sup>60</sup> After the elections in Poland in 1989, where not a single Communist won, the demand for freedom spread to Czechoslovakia, then to Hungary, Bulgaria, and East Germany. In November 1989, the Berlin Wall was dismantled and on Christmas Day Romania rid itself of its dictator Nicolai Ceausescu. Two years later, Gorbachev resigned as leader of the Soviet Union. Kengor and Doerner, *The Judge*, 334.

<sup>61</sup> The hypothesis of a "secret alliance" between John Paul II and Ronald Reagan was proposed by Carl Bernstein, "The Holy Alliance," and Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi, *His Holiness: John Paul II and the Hidden History of Our Times* (New York: Doubleday, 1996). Kengor (*The Crusader*, 139, and *God and Ronald Reagan*, 212) also thinks that the mutual effort of Reagan and the Pope was "a 'conspiracy' of sorts."

points in the history of the Cold War. And we know that the establishment of martial law in Poland led to a close collaboration, with the United States and the Holy See exchanging information and that President Reagan asked the Pope and Curia officials for guidance and support for policies such as economic sanctions against Poland.<sup>62</sup>

But the hypothesis of a “holy alliance” has been over-dramatized and overstated. First of all, sharing intelligence does not constitute an “alliance.” Secondly, the hypothesis is chronologically deficient: John Paul II did his maximum damage to the Communist enterprise during his first pilgrimage to Poland in June 1979, 19 months before Ronald Reagan became president.<sup>63</sup> The availability of archival materials (i.e., the Reagan administration papers and those of William Wilson, the first U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See) and a closer look at the nature of the relationship indicate that, although U.S. and Vatican interests converged, they were not identical, and the Holy See did not back all American initiatives.<sup>64</sup> At times, the United States had to lobby intensively on numerous issues to convince the Vatican to back its policies—e.g., the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) and Reagan’s policy in Nicaragua. This seems to indicate that Vatican support for U.S. foreign policy was not always forthcoming.<sup>65</sup>

The Pope himself dismissed the “holy alliance” as an after the fact deduction:

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<sup>62</sup> Marie Gayte, “The Vatican and the Reagan Administration: A Cold War Alliance?” *The Catholic Historical Review* 97:4 (October 2011): 720. See also Reagan’s entry for February 19, 1987 in Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 476.

<sup>63</sup> Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 441–442. See O’Sullivan, *The President, the Pope, and the Prime Minister*, 181–182. Tad Szulc, author of *Pope John Paul II: The Biography* (New York: Scribner, 1995), rejected the idea of such an alliance as a “myth . . . spawned in Washington” (John W. Carlson, “Seeking the Measure of John Paul II,” *Kripke Center Newsletter* 8:2 (Spring 1997) [<http://moses.creighton.edu/csrs/news/S97-2.html>, accessed on 25.05.2014]). “Marian Subocz, a spokesman for Poland’s Catholic Bishops Conference, described the claim [of a holy alliance] as ‘laughable.’ Jan Litynski, a former spokesman for Solidarity, which played a leading role in overthrowing Poland’s Communist government, described the book’s allegations as ‘total rubbish.’ Of course, U.S. policy and the Pope’s influence contributed to the collapse of communism. But far from being conspiratorial, the resistance struggle drew its power precisely from openness and transparency” (E.N.I., “Polish Church Denies Pope-CIA alliance,” *Christian Century* 113:30 (October 23, 1996): 1007).

<sup>64</sup> Gayte, “The Vatican and the Reagan Administration,” 720. Wilson, a businessman, fellow horseman, and old friend of Reagan’s from California was a Catholic convert. See Rooney, *The Global Vatican*, 145.

<sup>65</sup> Gayte, “The Vatican and the Reagan Administration,” 720.

One cannot construct a case from the consequences. Everybody knows the positions of President Reagan as a great policy leader in world politics. My position was that of a pastor, the Bishop of Rome, of one with responsibility for the Gospel, which certainly contains principles of the moral and social order and those regarding human rights . . . The Holy See's position, even in regard to my homeland, was guided by moral principle.<sup>66</sup>

The Pope and Reagan had no plan or plot. They did have a strong psychological and emotional tie that started with their meeting on June 7, 1982, the likes of which have rarely been seen in modern politics.<sup>67</sup> Based on shared religious and intellectual convictions and an abhorrence, firmly anchored in their experience, of all attempts to deform the structures of society and, above all, of attempts to deform the nature of the human being—a being created and redeemed by God, a being who is free—they were going in the same direction and, under Reagan's direction, successfully collaborated to undermine communism. Richard Allen described the information sharing and a modicum of coordination between the CIA and the Vatican as a “silent alliance.” This reinforces the point that “each of these institutions, for important reasons of its own, maintained a clear separation from the other in its activities.” The Vatican did not want to abridge its neutral and independent status by entering into clandestine activity with the U.S. or any other country and evidence that the CIA was colluding with Solidarity would have undermined its antigovernment efforts.<sup>68</sup>

### Conclusion

Various answers have been proposed to the question of who was most responsible for the fall of communism, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the end of the Cold War. Based on available evidence to date, a strong case can be made that the Pope and Reagan jointly did more than

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<sup>66</sup>Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 905, n. 13; Rooney, *The Global Vatican*, 141–144.

<sup>67</sup>Kengor, *The Crusader*, 139. In 1989, Reagan referred to the Pope as his “best friend” and continued, “Yes, you know I'm Protestant, but he's still my best friend” (Id., 287). Nancy Reagan also said that “John Paul II was Reagan's closest friend” (Mary Claire Kendall, “Reagan Revisited,” *The Wanderer* 32 (August 6, 2009): 1). “Let me assure you the Pope is still Catholic and let me add, still a truly great human being” (Letter of June 25, 1987 to Phil Regan, in Reagan, *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 735).

<sup>68</sup>Rooney, *The Global Vatican*, 143.

any others to bring about these astonishing events, even though neither one of these men ever claimed such credit for himself.<sup>69</sup>

John Paul II's soft power revolution that began with his visit to Poland in 1979 filled the spiritual void brought about by atheistic communism. He ignited the religious fervor and national spirit of the Polish people. He gave them a sense of self-confidence and hope that sustained them in the difficult decade that followed.<sup>70</sup> But a campaign just by Solidarity, even aided by the Pope, may have gotten no further than the Hungarians in

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<sup>69</sup> Reagan did not see himself as specifically chosen by God to defeat the Soviet Empire, but he did believe that America and his White House team fulfilled God's will. Reagan was too humble to credit anyone except his overall team. He saw himself as an instrument of God, and one of many who contributed. See Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan*, 213–216. John Paul II's analysis of the fall of communism in his 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus* nevertheless was a reminder of what he had accomplished. Citing the "violation of the rights of workers" and the "inefficiency of the economic system" as causes of what happened, he added: "The true cause of the new developments was the spiritual void brought about 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" (John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 24). Similarly, "Bill Clark, the key player, nearly the whole show regarding the Soviet takedown . . . gave everyone else the credit . . . He wanted no credit for himself" (Kengor and Doerner, *The Judge*, 349). On Reagan's desk in the Oval Office was a sign that read: "There's no limit to what a man can do or where he can go if he doesn't care who gets the credit" (Lee Edwards, "Ronald Reagan's 'Secret' Crusade" [<http://www.firstprinciplesjournal.com/articles.aspx?article=1381>, accessed on 05.06.2014]).

<sup>70</sup> "To be sure, there were other factors in creating the Revolution of 1989: the policies of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and Helmut Kohl; Mikhail Gorbachev, a Soviet leader not formed in the brutalities of Stalin's purge trials; the human rights provisions of the Helsinki Final Act and their effects throughout Europe, and in linking human rights activists in the captive nations and the old democracies. But if we ask why communism collapsed *when* it did—in 1989 rather than 1999 or 2009 or 2019—and *how* it did—without mass violence (with the sole exception of Romania)—then sufficient account has to be taken of June 1979 and the revolution of conscience it ignited. This was a different kind of revolution, because the revolutionaries were a different sort of people—people who understood, as Adam Michnik aptly put it, that 'those who begin by tearing down Bastilles end up building their own'" (George Weigel, "And the Wall Came Tumbling Down: A Lecture Given at Grove City College" [<http://www.eppc.org/publications/and-the-wall-came-tumbling-down>, accessed on 24.02.2014]). Weigel argued in his *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism* (Oxford, 1992) that the current Pope played a greater role in defeating communism in Central and Eastern Europe than any figure besides, perhaps, Ronald Reagan. Dinesh D'Souza maintained that Reagan "was the decisive agent of change" (*Ronald Reagan: How an Ordinary Man Became an Extraordinary Leader* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 28).



1956 or the Czechs in 1968 without the hard power assistance which unfolded throughout the 1980s, namely, the rearmament of the West on which Reagan insisted in tandem with the robust ideological challenge that he mounted. Neither the Pope's soft power revolution nor Reagan's hard power challenge could have sufficed by itself. Each needed the other. Together soft power and hard power led to victory. Without formal coordination—even without much discussion between the principals—Reagan and John Paul II pursued, with astonishing success, parallel courses toward the same objective: the defeat of communism and the restoration of freedom in Eastern and Central Europe.<sup>71</sup>

Ronald Reagan died on June 5, 2004, just one day after President George W. Bush bestowed the Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, on Pope John Paul II for his heroic efforts to topple communism. The Pope sent Mrs. Reagan his condolences recalling “with deep gratitude the late president's unwavering commitment to the service of the nation and to the cause of freedom as well as his abiding faith in the human and spiritual values which ensure a future of solidarity, justice, and peace in our world.” The Pope morally endorsed Reagan's policies. He identified them with “service,” “freedom,” “solidarity,” “justice,” and “peace.” Clearly, in the Pope's eyes, Reagan's policies not only had beneficial results but also were driven by good intentions—positive proof that their first meeting in 1982 at the Vatican where they discussed Reagan's foreign and defense policies, was a hinge of history.<sup>72</sup>

Less than a year later, on April 2, 2005, John Paul II died. Like the crowds that passed before Reagan's catafalque, the people in Rome were not grieving in the usual sense of the term, but rather giving thanks for the Pope's life.<sup>73</sup> Today, statues, monuments, streets, and squares throughout

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<sup>71</sup> Rooney, *The Global Vatican*, 142.

<sup>72</sup> John Paul II further indicated his regard for Reagan by sending Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the secretary of state of the Holy See, to President Reagan's funeral. O'Sullivan, *The President, the Pope, and the Prime Minister*, 328; Weigel, *The End and The Beginning*, 361. In 2007, Polish President Lech Kaczyński posthumously conferred on Reagan the highest Polish distinction, the Order of the White Eagle, stating that Reagan had inspired the Polish people to work for change and helped unseat the repressive communist regime—this “would not have been possible if it was not for the tough-mindedness, determination, and feeling of mission of President Ronald Reagan” (“President Kaczynski Presents Order of the White Eagle to Late President Ronald Reagan” [[https://web.archive.org/web/20090305223044/http://poland.usembassy.gov/events\\_2007/president-kaczynski-presents-order-of-the-white-eagle-to-late-president-ronald-reagan--18-july-2007.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20090305223044/http://poland.usembassy.gov/events_2007/president-kaczynski-presents-order-of-the-white-eagle-to-late-president-ronald-reagan--18-july-2007.html), accessed on 05.06.2014]).

<sup>73</sup> O'Sullivan, *The President, the Pope, and the Prime Minister*, 328–329.

Poland honor John Paul II and Ronald Reagan so that their contributions in bringing down the evil empire in that country remain alive in the minds and hearts not only of the Polish people but also of those everywhere who love freedom.

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**A POLISH POPE AND AN AMERICAN  
PRESIDENT: 1979–1989**

**SUMMARY**

The author examines the shared religious and intellectual conviction, toughness, and an abhorrence of communism of Pope John Paul II and President Reagan that contributed to the demise of that system in Poland. The author discusses similarities between these two men; their approaches to communism; their meetings beginning in 1982; the hypothesis of a “holy alliance,” and concludes that based on available evidence to date, a strong case can be made that the Pope and Reagan jointly did more than any others to bring about the fall of communism, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the end of the Cold War.

**KEYWORDS:** Pope John Paul II, Ronald Reagan, Poland, Communism.