

Sermon In Memoriam John Paul II...

Pope John Paul II has been laid to rest under the basilica of St Peter's in Rome. What manner of man was he, and what is his legacy to us?

Here was a young man who studied theology, risking death under Nazi persecution. He was an intellectual schooled in the philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas. He also made himself expert in the philosophical currents of the 20th century. He was on a canoeing trip with his friends when summoned to become a bishop. He walked miles through the rain to his first synod as an Archbishop, entered the chamber, took off his socks and hung them over the radiator to dry. He was not a cloistered monk with no worldly experience. He was a sportsman, a playwright, actor and poet.

The Catholic Church was running wild when he was elected – after the destructive innovations of the Second Vatican Council. Of course, he couldn't actually say aloud that Pope John XXIII was a disaster. The catholic doctrine of authority doesn't allow popes to speak critically of their predecessors. But John Paul II set about reasserting traditional doctrine. He restored Christian truth to the corridors of the Vatican which before he arrived were echoing to the theological and moral relativism of a materialistic, atheistic age

He was Christ-like. Could anybody doubt it – seeing his origins in Poland, the country that suffered more than most in the 20th century? First under the Nazis and then the Communists. God gave the world a sign when he raised up this peasant from Poland to be a prince in his Kingdom. John Paul went back to Poland when the trade union Solidarity was being threatened by the totalitarians and used the word *solidarity* in a sermon in the dockyards of Gdansk – and 250,000 people started chanting, *We want God!*

No wonder the Communists tried to have him assassinated! In the depths of the Communist terror and genocide it was put to Stalin that his savagery would not play well with the Catholic Church. And Stalin, the military dictator second to none, replied with a sneer, “How many divisions does the Pope have?”

Well now they know!

One of the visions of the children at Fatima was of a bishop in a white cassock being threatened. The details of this vision were sealed in an envelope and not opened until recently. The Pope was shot on the anniversary of the appearance of the Virgin Mary to the three children. The Pope encouraged devotion to the Virgin as an encouragement in the struggle for freedom from the Communist tyranny. You know what Mary sang in her song: *He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble and meek...* You know of course that in those children's visions Our Lady had asked that they pray for Russia.

Those achievements by themselves, so to speak, were momentous. But even more important than his religiously-motivated political interventions was his restoration of Christian orthodoxy. For three hundred years following what is misleadingly called the Enlightenment, philosophers in the western world had made thought and

speculation the foundation of all knowledge. Pope John – aided I must admit first by Aristotle and St Thomas Aquinas and then by the unlikely character Martin Heidegger – stopped this suicidal nonsense. He proclaimed that more important than thought is Being – because thought must be about something. And all being is derivative – a gift from the Being of God.

Let me remind you what the errors were which John Paul sought to correct. First there was the error of Rousseau who said:

Man is naturally good, loving justice and order. There is absolutely no original perversity in the human heart, and the first movements of nature are always right.

How can anyone who has paused to look even for a minute into his own heart believe a lie like that? And yet the so called *progressive* morality of our modern world is based on that lie. It is not progressive: it is destructive because it is satanic, a lie.

The next lie and slander was that of Voltaire who said:

Religion must be destroyed among respectable people and left to the mob for whom it was made.

This is the Voltaire who is renowned for his egalitarianism. Do you hear how he slanders the ordinary people – calling them *the mob*?

The dominant philosophy of the last 300 years has taught that morality is only relative, a matter of opinion – and anybody's opinion is as good as anyone else's. What's good and what's bad – we can make it up for ourselves. But John Paul said:

If man can decide by himself without God what is good and what is bad, he can also determine that a group of people is to be annihilated.

Which is what the Nazis and the Communists did and they did it in the name of atheism. And not only the Nazis and the Communists. The Pope issued this warning also:

We cannot remain silent regarding a tragic question that is more pressing today than ever. The fall of the regimes built on ideologies of evil put an end to the forms of extermination in the countries concerned. There remains the legal extermination of human beings conceived but unborn. And this extermination is decreed by democratically elected parliaments which invoke the notion of civil progress for society and for all humanity.

But this week we have heard also criticism of the Pope. It is said that he had no policy to help prevent the spread of AIDS. Well, the Pope did not dole out condoms – not even to those most reluctant to use them. He simply repeated the ancient commandments about faithfulness in marriage and chastity outside it. And this turns out to be the best possible policy against the spread of AIDS.

The question arises: if we are persuaded by the moral relativists to go in for wholesale birth control, mass abortion and euthanasia on demand – who is it that is actually in

favour of human life and who against? If these secularists have their way, you wonder what human life will be left.

This Pope was no backwoodsman, no romantic religionist with his head in the sand. He was one of the most accomplished philosophers of the century. He regularly hosted seminars for the leading physicists and biological scientists of our age. His greatest achievement was to go to the centre of the secular, materialistic, and atheistic argument and to show beyond any doubt and in words of one syllable that it doesn't hold water. He showed that the Christian faith is not a disease to be eradicated as Rousseau and Voltaire and all their followers today believe. He showed that the Christian faith is in fact the answer to our problems. And it is the answer for one reason only – because it is *true*

This is at once a Reformation and a Restoration more significant than anything that happened in the 16th and 17th centuries. It will turn out – please God – to be the single event which saves mankind from the abyss. This is why he should be Pope John Paul the Great – by the public acclamation not just of catholics but of all humanity.

