

VATICAN ANXIOUSLY AWAITS A NEW POPE

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Pope John Paul II is so close to physical—or mental—collapse, that Vatican officials are worried that he might. Yet they are even more worried that he might not!

The situation has come to such a crisis that a leading bishop openly declares the pope should resign—while he still has enough faculties to do so.

Yet, in the past seven centuries, no pope has resigned. They are either murdered or they die.

And, as those who have read our 56-page book, *The Murder of Pope John Paul I*, well-know,—it would not be best to assassinate two popes in a row. The city of Rome knows too well what happened to John Paul II's predecessor. (See *The Murder of Pope John Paul I*, \$3.00 + \$1.50.)

The story of the current crisis, and its background, seems incredible in some of its details, so we will heavily quote from three sources:

1. *His Holiness*, Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi.
1. *The British Telegraph*, January 2, 2000.
2. *Time magazine*, January 24, 2000.

Karol Jozef Wojtyla (the future Pope Paul II at the time) was born on May 7, 1920 (*Bernstein and Politi*, p. 17). Entering the priesthood, he eventually became a Polish archbishop.

But the day they killed Albino Luciani (Pope John Paul I; September 29, 1978) was to be the turning point in Wojtyla's life.

"On Monday morning, October 16, there were two more ballots. Siri began to lose ground, while many of the other votes were divided among Cardinals Giovanni Columbo, Ugo Poletti, and the Dutchman Johannes Willebrands. The results indicated that the Italian candidates were finished. On the sixth ballot, the last before the midday meal, the votes in favor of the archbishop of Krakow abruptly surged.

"At lunch Karol Wojtyla looked so tense that some of his supporters feared he might refuse to accept election. That afternoon, as the whispery silence thickened, Karol Wojtyla was glimpsed in the cell of Cardinal Wyszynski [the senior cardinal of Poland], agitated and weeping. He had collapsed in the arms of Wyszynski, the primate of Poland. There was no more doubt what would happen next.

" 'If they elect you,' Wyszynski said, 'you must

accept. For Poland.'

"Wojtyla composed himself. Two ballots later he heard his name announced. Ninety-nine cardinals out of one hundred and eight had given him their vote. They had done the unimaginable: They had chosen a pope from a country subject to the Soviet Union, a country with a Marxist and atheist government. He was the first non-Italian pontiff in 450 years [it is believed the Vatican murdered the last one, Pope Adrian VI, on September 14, 1523 after a reign of only 20 months], a young pope, at the age of fifty-eight."—*Bernstein and Politi*, pp. 169-170.

Only fifty-eight, a young pope. We recall the news articles back in 1978, noting how athletic Wojtyla was. He went skiing as often as he could.

But the attempted assassination of May 13, 1981, slowed him down.

"At five p.m., the pope emerged from the Apostolic Palace for his Wednesday general audience in St. Peter's Square, which was to include a ride around the square to wave to the crowds, followed by an address from his throne. The audience, Dziwisz remembers, 'began punctually at five o'clock, in a perfectly orderly fashion. Nothing foreshadowed what was going to happen' as Wojtyla entered his open popemobile.

"As he rode around the colonnade, the pope appeared at ease, 'his face pink and smiling,' Dziwisz recalls. 'How young he looks,' thought a Polish nun as he passed in front of her. He went around the Egyptian obelisk once, then a second time. As always, Don Stanislaw was just behind the pope, who was standing.

"Suddenly Dziwisz heard a deafening noise and recoiled as the pigeons all over the square took flight. 'I didn't understand immediately what had happened, for until then no one thought that such a thing was possible'—that someone would try to kill the pope.

"But the pope himself and his security team must have known he was courting danger. In Karachi, on February 16 [three months earlier] of that same year, an hour before the pope was to visit the municipal stadium, a bomb exploded, killing the man who was carrying it. On November 26, 1979, Mehmet Ali Agca, a Turkish terrorist, had publicly vowed to kill the pope during his visit to Turkey. In January 1980, Alexandre De Marenches, head of

the French secret service, had sent an emissary to warn the pope of a Communist plot on his life. 'I had been warned,' De Marenches disclosed. 'The information was important because it was credible' . . . One would think that, given the close relations between Italy and the Vatican, the Vatican Secret Service would inform Rome about the situation.' But apparently that never happened. And indeed the gunman who fired several shots—two of which struck the pope—was the same Mehmet Ali Agca, whose Browning 9mm automatic pistol was less than twenty feet from the pope when the trigger was pulled."—*Bernstein and Politi*, pp. 293-294.

In the years since then, John Paul II had been instrumental in closely working with U.S. intelligence to counterwork Soviet activity. But that is another story. Repeatedly, John Paul and his advisers consulted with high-placed CIA and U.S. State Department personnel, regarding ways to counteract Soviet influence in Eastern Europe. (The Vatican also had visits from the FBI, over the Mafia-controlled Vatican Bank, which was doing money-laundering, for part of the take, for the Mafia; see our book, *The Murder of John Paul I.*)

At the same time, John Paul's devotion for the Virgin Mary became almost obsessively fervent. This was because, just as Ali Agca raised the gun and took aim, the pope had stooped down when he saw a girl in the crowd holding up a picture of the Virgin. John Paul bent down to look at it; just then the shots rang out. Fully believing that the picture saved his life, the pope vowed even deeper devotion to the Virgin.

This led him, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, to believe every so-called apparition (appearance) of the Virgin to faithful Catholics throughout the world. Mary is said to be repeatedly predicting that a great final crisis would occur some time just after the turn of the century, either in the year 2000 or 2001. (See my book, *The Marian Messages*, for an extensive collection of quotations and their import: *The Marian Messages: Final Events as Predicted by the Spirits to Faithful Roman Catholics*, 65 pp., 8½ x 11, \$5.50 + \$1.50). You should be aware of what they are being taught.

But the two bullets which brought him closer to the Virgin Mary also sapped his vitality. By the 1990s, John Paul was growing weaker. Yet he held on. Those of you who have read in *Keys of This Blood*, by Malachi Martin, know that the pope was convinced that Rome would ultimately conquer the powers of the West (U.S.) and the East (Communism)—and that the turn of the century would bring great deliverance to the papal church.

By the late 1990s, John Paul's concern was centered on remaining alive till the new millennium brought the fulfillment of the Virgin's messages.

But now his associates in the Vatican are concerned lest he continue on—and becomes a basket case.

"The race to find a new Pope has begun in earnest amid fears that the health of John Paul has deteriorated to the point where he may not be able to continue in office. Speculation that a new Pope may soon have to be found has increased with recent reports that the longest serving pontiff of the 20th century now has to be pushed around on a trolley by two attendants, to ease the strain on his legs."—"Vatican's Quest Intensifies for the Next Pope," *British Telegraph*, Sunday, January 2, 2000.

Pope John Paul II's condition keeps worsening. Selected from many which could be cited, here are several news headlines:

December 27, 1995: Pope is taken ill during blessing.

March 14, 1996: Sick Pope cancels audience.

September 7, 1996: Frail Pope flies to Hungary for monastery's millennium.

January 26, 1999: Tired Pope heads for U.S. on 'right to life' crusade.

June 13, 1999: Pontiff cuts his head in bathroom fall.

June 16, 1999: Fear for Pope's health as giant mass is called off.

November 11, 1999: Pope is too tired for foreign trips, says his doctor.

As you can see, within the past year, John Paul's condition has deteriorated.

"The Pope is clearly seriously ill. A November trip to Georgia was overshadowed by a series of worrying convulsions that television cameras were hastily barred from filming. Ill health has also led to a curtailment of his participation in the church's jubilee celebrations."—*British Telegraph*, Sunday, January 2, 2000.

Here is a rather clear statement on the pope's condition:

"The vigorous 58-year-old elected in 1978 to challenge communism suffers from the onset of Parkinson's disease, limps and has terrible difficulty negotiating steps. His left arm shakes, at times uncontrollably. His face is rigid, and his speech is slurred. At the end of 1999, his aides moved him around [the inside of] St. Peter's Basilica with a pushcart."—"Is He the Retiring Type?" *Time magazine*, January 24, 2000.

The crisis broke open through the media, when a German bishop publicly announced that Pope John Paul II should resign from office.

"Personally, I think the pope is capable of admitting courageously, 'I can no longer carry out my task in an adequate way.' I believe the Pope would be capable of that if he had the impression that he was no longer able to lead the church with author-

ity.' After Bishop Karl Lehmann of Mainz offered that opinion on German radio, a small earthquake of headlines went through Rome. '*German Bishops: The Pope Is Sick. He Should Resign,*' declared one paper. '*Wojtyla Step Aside. A Strong Pope Is Needed,*' said another, using John Paul II's family name."—*Time*, January 24, 2000.

That any official in the church should publicly make an issue of the ominous situation was highly embarrassing to the Vatican.

"A papal abdication? The commotion overshadowed the announcement that the Pope would travel to the Middle East in March as part of the Jubilee Year, a period for which he has been strenuously preparing. There has been some concern over the image of the Pontiff broadcast over the millennial weekend: one of a visibly weakened man."—*Time*, January 24, 2000.

The possibility was startling, since no pope had abdicated in the past 700 years.

"But there has been no voluntary papal abdication since Celestine in 1294. And while Celestine was later canonized, Dante placed him in the *Inferno* for *ii gran rifiuto* (the great refusal [leaving office]), albeit only in the first circle of Hell: Limbo. Other pontiffs have been removed by murder, martyrdom, military intervention or rare coups by the College of Cardinals during pagan rule, the confusion of the Dark Ages, Byzantine meddling, populist revolutions or chronic political impotence."—*Time*, January 24, 2000.

What would happen if such an unheard of possibility were to happen? Would the pope totally leave the Vatican or would he become a senior adviser? (Our own General Conference presidents who are replaced continue, as has done N. C. Wilson, to serve on the General Conference Committee. Robert Folkenberg resigned and is out completely.)

"If he resigns, he has to pack up and go,' says the Jesuit scholar Thomas Reese. If he retires after 80 (an age he will reach in May), he would not be allowed to attend the conclave that will gather to elect his successor.

"But John Paul II, living in retirement, would also be an influence too powerful to ignore, even if he is not anywhere near the voting cardinals. He is probably aware that every new Pope in the past 300 years has been dramatically different from his predecessor. John Paul II may have forestalled that by naming some 90% of the cardinals now in the college. If he retired, he would be even more certain that the church stays his course. Could a new Pope change policies if the former Pope, with all his prestige, were still alive, looking over his shoulder? Japanese Emperors and Shoguns were used to 'retire' to achieve just that kind of uncrossable seniority."—*Time*, January 24, 2000.

Vatican officials have, for quite some time, been deeply concerned about John Paul's increasing physi-

cal and mental incapacity. They have quietly been laying plans for his successor.

Even as he declares that he will not resign, John Paul is meeting with possible successors, in case he might suddenly die. The pope wants to sound out their policies.

"Inside the Vatican, officials are admitting that intense negotiations are now underway on the future of the papacy. The Pope himself has held a series of 'sounding out' lunches with potential papal candidates. These private meals, in the presence of one witness, have taken place with the French cardinal Roger Etchegarry; the Colombian cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos; and the Italian cardinal Camillo Ruini.

"Observers see the lunches as an attempt by John Paul II to maintain control of the succession and its timing."—*British Telegraph*, Sunday, January 2, 2000.

But lest anyone think that John Paul was considering turning in a resignation, on December 22, 1999, he told Vatican officials not to expect it.

"Three days before Christmas, in a private meeting with senior Vatican advisers, he issued a stern warning to ambitious cardinals, saying that he had no intention of standing down."—*British Telegraph*, Sunday, January 2, 2000.

The pope said he will continue in office, regardless of what others may want.

"According to a leak from the meeting, the 79-year-old pontiff said that he had a 'divine mission' to 'continue to guide the church despite personal weakness.' "—*British Telegraph*, Sunday, January 2, 2000.

But church officials are increasingly focused on the problem. They recognize that something must be done. Since only a church council would have the authority to evict the pope, the center of talk largely revolves around who John Paul's successor might be. Contenders are jostling into position.

"The characteristically defiant message has failed to stop the gossip. Amid the upwardly mobile in his flock are beginning to plot . . . Officially, talk about life after John Paul is forbidden within the church. But the corridors of Roman Catholic power are alive with intrigue. 'Of course people are talking about it and everyone has their own theories,' one Vatican official said. 'It's a strange situation because this time there is no clear favourite to become the next Pope. It could be any one of 10 candidates.'

"The open field has generated some discreet but energetic campaigning, as bewildering battle hues are drawn on geographical and ideological grounds. The Italians want an Italian after 21 years of Polish rule. The liberals want a candidate who approves of women priests and married clergy. Africans are lobbying for the first black Pope. The Latin Americans want a non-European. Reformers demand a

Pope who will devolve power back to national churches. Conservatives require a strong man who will keep power in Rome.”—*British Telegraph, Sunday, January 2, 2000.*

That is what matters to Vatican officials: “keeping power in Rome.” They fear that the next pope may be a non-Italian, yet it is likely they will not be able to keep it from happening.

“Up to 120 cardinals will meet in conclave to choose the next Pope when the time comes, and the most senior among them are already pitching for votes. Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, the Archbishop of Milan, carries most Italian hopes. A heavyweight theologian, he made an impassioned address to a gathering of European bishops last autumn, demanding doctrinal changes to such ‘knotty problems’ as the position of women in the church, sexuality and marital discipline.

“The thinly veiled plea for liberalization—a direct challenge to the conservative John Paul—drew hoorahs from the Italian press. ‘Martini’s biggest ally is the Italian media,’ said a Rome journalist who has covered the Vatican for the past 15 years. ‘But his nationality is also his problem. The other European cardinals will never vote for an Italian. They don’t want to see the Italians regain complete control over the papacy.’

“That drawback may also scotch the hopes of Cardinal Ruini, the head of the Italian episcopal council (CJE), who presents himself as a democratizer. Along with the Brazilian Lucas Moreira Neves, Cardinal Castrillon is a hot tip from Latin America, Roman Catholicism’s boom continent. Singled out to assist the Pope during Holy Week services, Castrillon has also been awarded the copresidency of the synod of the Americas, a formidable power-base. Other names whispered in the Vatican include Thomas Winning, the Scottish cardinal; and the Archbishop of Paris, Jean-Marie Lustiger. Christoph Schoenborn, the high-flying Archbishop of Vienna, is considered promising but, at the age of 54, too young.”—*British Telegraph, Sunday, January 2, 2000.*

Who is this Bishop Lehmann, Bishop of Mainz, Germany, who dares to openly challenge the church with a public call for the pope’s resignation?

“But last week’s announcement may have more personal roots. There is no love lost between John Paul and Bishop Lehmann, who heads the German Catholic Bishops Conference. The German church runs 250 abortion-counseling centers, and after five years of wrangling, its bishops bowed to pressure from the Pope last June and agreed to stop issuing certificates that permit women to terminate a pregnancy within the first 12 weeks. (Without the certifi-

cate, abortion is illegal.) Says historian and novelist F__ Andrew Greeley: ‘Lehmann won’t be made a cardinal as long as John Paul is Pope.’ After the loud Italian headlines, Lehmann insisted he had been misunderstood. ‘I didn’t ask for the Pope’s retirement,’ he said. He did reiterate, however, that John Paul was quite old and that it would be ‘opportune’ for the church to have a strong Pope.”—*Time, January 24, 2000.*

Church leaders elsewhere in the world are upset that the pope is trying to predetermine who will be his successor.

“Around the world, senior church figures have begun to mutter darkly about high-handedness from the “super-bishop” from Rome. His successor will be expected to cede some papal power even as he seizes it. But there is a great deal of politics to play behind the scenes before then. For the moment the Polish Pope is still centre-stage. But the rustling in the wings has become audible.”—*British Telegraph, Sunday, January 2, 2000.*

Every indication from the pope is that he has no intention of resigning.

“It seems unlikely that John Paul II will step down. Certainly not this year, which is important to him symbolically, with his planned pilgrimage to the Middle East.”—*Time, January 24, 2000.*

Bishop Lehmann’s concerns are very real, for the potential problem is a serious one. Medical science is now able to keep people alive after they should be dead.

“Still, Lehmann has revealed a latent concern. Says Greeley: ‘The church has a real problem in that there is no provision in church legislation for a Pope who becomes incapable of acting as Pope.’ While the Vatican can operate with an incapacitated Pope, important decisions (the naming of bishops) and documents would have to wait until he was well enough to approve of them—or until a new Pope came around. A mentally compromised Pope kept alive artificially would present the church with a constitutional crisis. If a Pope can see that coming, says Greeley, he should choose—or be persuaded—to retire. In which case, canon law is simple. The Pope is one of the world’s last absolute rulers and answers only to God. All he has to say is, ‘I resign.’ ”—*Time, January 24, 2000.*

John Paul could have a stroke or other complication, and be kept alive in a hospital unconscious on tubes for years. No one would dare let the poor man die in peace. Since he has Parkinson’s, he could become increasingly feeble and essentially unable to carry on any duties.

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