

EDITORIAL

The Failed Pope?

Voices continue to claim that John Paul's reign has been a failure, even on the eve of his 25th anniversary as Pope. He is blamed for the scandals in the Church — shouldn't he have disciplined bishops? He is blamed for dissent in the Church — shouldn't he have disciplined wayward theologians?

What can be said, honestly and forthrightly, in the Pope's defense? Isn't it just our affection for an indisputably holy old man that makes us want to make excuses for him?

Quite a lot can be said for him, actually. In fact, his governing style has been celebrated as brilliant for more than a decade, and yet some of the very people who described it best seem to have forgotten all about it.

His is the governing style that banished communism from Poland — not by decree and denunciation, but by the hard way; the way that lasts. Here are three characteristics of it.

The Pope creates facts.

When he was cardinal-archbishop of Krakow, the Pope didn't spend his time denouncing communists who wouldn't allow him to build new churches. Instead, he went to the places he wanted churches built and started saying Masses in meadows until a de facto parish had been formed, one the communists had to recognize.

In the cities, he didn't spend his time excommunicating communist sympathizers. Instead, he encouraged Catholic projects like the Solidarity movement, creating a positive anti-communist initiative that swept the country.

Look at the "facts" the Pope has created or boosted in just the last decade: The Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Jubilee Year, the wildfire growth of the new lay movements he encouraged within the Church, the World Youth Days, the Year of the Rosary and, with his new encyclical, a resurgence of Eucharistic adoration.

If his was a papacy mostly concerned with delineating and denouncing the darkness, would these candles have been lit?

The Pope's arguments transcend ideological factions.

Cardinal Karol Wojtyla was sometimes criticized for not explaining in clear detail the evils of the ideology of communism, even as it swept Poland. After the fall of communism, we know better.

The Pope spent his energy — and credibility — teaching about the dignity of the human person, the value of work and the proper ends of the economy. Just as importantly, he spent his time reminding Poles of their unique culture and national identity. These proved deadly antibodies against the disease of communism.

If he had taught mainly about the wickedness of communism, he would have raised defenses and entrenched in his opponents. Instead, he took seriously the questions that communism raises and answered them.

The Pope has done the same thing in the Church. Take sexual morals. Instead of repeating denunciations that the world thinks it has understood and rejected, he has patiently introduced a new theology of the body. He answers the world's questions about sexuality by elevating sexuality's importance beyond what the world could guess.

The Pope is a witness to hope.

Some critics have argued that the Pope is too "optimistic" rather than "realistic" — that he expects really good encyclicals and youth rallies to trump the decadence elsewhere in the Church.

But the man who saw his country liberated by force from the Nazis only to be drowned under the horrors of communism is not likely to have rose-colored misconceptions about the wonderfulness of men.

What this Pope does have, is faith. He knows that God really did create the universe, really does care about its future and really will help it along. He believes that human beings are prone to sin, but that love, and its constant companion, freedom, is — in the words of Solomon — stronger than death.

If the Pope's governing style puts a great deal of trust in human freedom to eventually choose the truth, it's because God's did first.

And the man who saw the Berlin Wall go up and then come back down, the man who praises America's freedom even while he regrets its excesses, may be onto something.

LETTERS

Free-Market Injustice

I read with great interest Angelo Matera's essay on the free economy and Catholic social justice ("The Pope and St. Joseph on Wall Street," May 11-17). This is an issue of social justice that impacts the lives of every American and every place where we have exported our values. Back in my days of excess, I used to refer to my trips to the mall as retail therapy — and I used to think that there was no other way to live.

I am grateful for Pope John Paul II's eloquence and courage in speaking out against the injustices of the free market. Gospel frugality is fundamental to the universal call to holiness. But I think it scares many of us because we think that means that we are supposed to want to be destitute. Of course, what it means is that we must shun excess. On the supply side, we have to stop cutting corners where they should not be cut and defending indefensible practices.

As consumers, we need to stop organizing our lives around our latest or next purchase. It is amazing how many conversations are about getting and spending money. And, we have to stop defining ourselves and others by what we drive, what we wear and where we live. We live in a society where even children know which zip codes and telephone prefixes represent the "best" neighborhoods. We teach the children to be miniature consumers and are not surprised when they talk about what they want in terms of material possessions. Even sectors of society not in the free market, including universities — where students are seen as consumers — are defined by the market logic. If we could make our economy more human and more Christian, I think we would breathe a collective sigh of relief.

In defense of the short-term focus of the free market, John Maynard Keynes is often quoted as saying, "In the long run we are all dead." That, of course, is entirely the point.

MARY ELIZABETH COURTNEY
Columbus, Ohio

From War to Battle

Now that the war is over we have to ask ourselves one question: What did we accomplish? According to the just-war theory, there are certain conditions one has to meet in order for war to be all right.

The first condition is being the last resort. In this particular war against terrorism we really had no opponent to face because you can't put a link to who's responsible for terrorism. I believe the United States failed to meet the first criterion of just war.

The second condition is having legitimate authority to declare war. After the attacks of Sept. 11, President Bush promised there would be retaliation on those responsible for this horrific act and will be put to justice. I feel that the United States did have legitimate authority because the longer we waited, the more time it would give the terrorists to plan another massive strike on this country. The big question is whether or not Osama bin Laden is associated with Saddam Hussein. We know Saddam has many chemical weapons he would like to experiment with on the United States. The United States did give Iraq plenty of chances prior to war to disarm and make Saddam step out of power. We gave Saddam an ultimatum and he did not cooperate with us.

I feel the United States did a good job of meeting the conditions of the last two just-war principles. With our strong army, we had reasonable expectations of success. Our military was well prepared and very few U.S. lives were lost. The ultimate goal in war is to re-establish peace, which is going to happen for the Iraqi people. No longer will they be oppressed and abused by a dictatorship.

There's only one problem with this victory of war. The terrorists such as Saddam are still out there, but now they just want to retaliate and destroy the United States even more. If Saddam is still alive, I'm sure he would want nothing more than to mess with our country like we did to his "dictatorship." I think we are in for a long battle for the next years to come.

JOE ROBINSON
Dubuque, Iowa

A Pro-Life Sourpuss

Cathleen Cleaver always writes well for your paper. I appreciate her writing style and good content, almost more than any other writer you [publish].

I do, however, have one beef with Cathleen's recent article on The WB network's show "Everwood." It's not just Cathleen who has highlighted in the Register the pro-life position of Patricia Heaton, the wife in "Everybody Loves Raymond." Several of your commentators have done the same thing over this past year.

I understand that the pro-life community is eager to find and highlight pro-life role models in Hollywood. But, while it is commendable that Heaton is pro-life, I have a hard time admiring her simply because the character she plays on television doesn't seem very "pro-life." I'm not talking about abortion here. Heaton's character is an eye-rolling, sarcastic woman who doesn't often seem happily married and who experiences constant tension with



(KRT Illustration
by Doug Griswold)

Embryonic Ensoulment

I found Father Pacholczyk's interview to be fascinating ("The Little Flower Blossoms in Yale Neuroscientist," Inperson, May 4-10). I was somewhat taken aback when he said, "An embryo is a human being, a being that is human, that is not some other kind of animal. Whether it's a person yet at the moment of conception, whether it's been ensouled — those are very interesting intellectual discussions but they're not ultimately relevant."

The last sentence of the above quote got more than a raised eyebrow from me as I read it. I always thought the Church's teaching was that at the moment of conception an embryo is ensouled and is considered life, and if it is life it is human. Am I wrong in my interpretation? It seems to me that you can't be human without a soul.

I wonder if Father Pacholczyk has had his opinion considered by a panel of theologians. I look forward to reading an explanation of his comments in a future edition of your paper.

RAYMOND C. MILLS
Newport, Rhode Island

Father Pacholczyk Replies

Mr. Mills' comments are emblematic of a rather common misunderstanding about the Catholic Church's teaching on ensoulment. The Church has never definitively stated when the ensoulment of the human embryo takes place. It remains an open question. The "Declaration on Procured Abortion" from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1974 phrases the matter with considerable precision:

"This declaration expressly leaves aside the question of the moment when the spiritual soul is infused. There is not a unanimous tradition on this point and authors are as yet in disagreement. For some it dates from the first instant; for others it could not at least precede nidation [implantation in the uterus]. It is not within the competence of science to decide between these views, because the existence of an immortal soul is not a question in its field. It is a philosophical problem from which our moral affirmation remains independent ..."

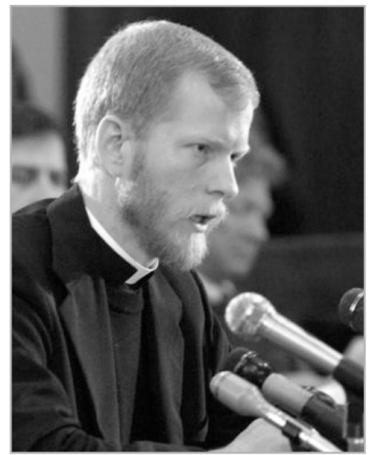
And the moral affirmation of the Church is simply this: that the human embryo must be treated as if it were already ensouled, even if it might not yet be so. It must be treated as if it were a person from the moment of conception, even if there exists the possibility that it might not yet be so. Why this rather subtle, nuanced position, instead of simply declaring outright that zygotes are ensouled, and therefore are persons? Because, as the declaration stresses, there has never been a unanimous tradition on this point.

The matter has been discussed for centuries, and delayed ensoulment was probably the norm for most of Christian history, with immediate ensoulment gaining some serious momentum of its own only in the 1600s. Aquinas, for example, held that ensoulment occurred not right at the first instant but at a timepoint removed from the beginning, in order to allow the matter of the embryo to undergo development and become "apt" for the reception of an immortal soul from God. Augustine seemed to shift his opinion back and forth during his lifetime between immediate and delayed ensoulment. Even today in various quarters, the discussions continue, with new embryological details like twinning and chimaerization impinging on the debate, and new conceptual questions arising from the intricate biology surrounding totipotency and pluripotency.

In the final analysis, it is salutary to realize that it is God's business as to when he ensouls the human embryo, and we may never categorically resolve the matter from our limited vantage point. More relevant to the discussion is the fact that we do not need an answer to this fascinating and speculative question in order to grasp the essential moral

her in-laws and even her own husband. The basis of the show is "put-down humor." Every time I see Heaton's character, I can't help but think how miserable she seems. This kind of negativity makes a family comedy — and one of its main characters — laudable?

If Heaton wanted to live out most consis-



Father Tadeusz Pacholczyk testifies on human cloning during a hearing of a Massachusetts Senate committee last year. (CNS photo by Cory Silken, The Pilot)

conclusion that human embryos are absolutely inviolable and deserving of unconditional respect.

The Church's perspective on this matter is sometimes characterized in these terms: "If we don't know whether the early embryo is a person, we shouldn't shoot into a patch of dark bushes, because it might be a person making the rustling noises. Because there's a chance the embryo is a person, we can't risk destroying it." This is a problematic summary of the Church's position, however, because she actually embraces a much more forceful line of argumentation, namely: that we know exactly what is in the bushes, and therefore we cannot ever shoot. We know exactly what the embryo is, namely, a human being, a being that is clearly and unmistakably human. It is not a zebra type of being, a plant type of being or some other kind of being. This is a scientific affirmation which does not ultimately depend on religion, value systems, or imposing anything on anyone. It is a matter of simple empirical observation.

All of us began as embryonic human beings, and such human beings are never to be instrumentalized for stem-cell extraction or other destructive ends. Hence the Church recognizes that we need not worry about the fine details of the timing of personhood or ensoulment in a misguided attempt to identify a basis for the moral question. We need only recognize that once you are constituted a human being (which always occurs at fertilization or at an event that mimics fertilization like cloning), you are an embryonic member of the human race who is to be protected unconditionally.

The human zygote, thus, is already a being that is human, and such beings are sacrosanct entities, because that's what we all directly spring from at the root level. What the human embryo actually is, even at its earliest and most undeveloped stage, makes it the only kind of entity capable of receiving the gift of an immortal soul from God; no other animal embryo can receive this gift. Hence, the early human embryo is never merely biological tissue; at a minimum, it is the privileged sanctuary of someone meant to develop as a human person, and to be treated and respected as such. Once you are a human being, you are a bearer of human rights, even if your personhood/ensoulment might end up coming further along in the sequence of things. This teaching, I am convinced, may well be one of the strongest declarations of the Church's belief in the absolute primacy of the value of personhood over all other considerations. The human person, even in its most incipient and precursorial instantiation in the embryonic human being, is to be safeguarded in an absolute way.

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