

# Le pontificat romain dans l'époque contemporaine The Papacy in the Contemporary Age

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## John Paul II's Canonisation Policy

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**Abstract** During his pontificate John Paul II proclaimed 1342 beati and 482 saints, such a large amount that it accounts for more than half of the sanctifications across the entirety of Catholicism stretching back to the Congregation of Rites (1588). Along with such fruitful use of sanctification came a certain planning that was not only pastoral in nature, but also political, in the broadest sense of the term. The essay aims to analyse how under John Paul II's pontificate the traditional concept of holiness began to mutate, taking on multiple functions, while its concrete manifestations – beatifications and canonisations – became active instruments of ecclesiastical government.

**Summary** 1 The Reform Legal System relating to Canonisations. – 2 The 'New Evangelisation'. – 3 The Ethical Prerogative. – 4 Christian Unity. – 5 Conclusion.

**Keywords** Holiness. Canonisation. John Paul II. New Evangelisation. Catholic Church.

### 1 The Reform Legal System Relating to Canonisations

The reforming of the legal structure regulating sanctity decreed by John Paul II in 1983 with the apostolic constitution *Divinus perfectionis Magister*<sup>1</sup> was aimed at adapting the system to the papal plans regarding canonisation activities, and mainly consisted of reducing the length of the beatification and canonisation causes, in this way incentivizing, multiplying and updating them.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the examination of the new canonical process brought a number of important issues to light. Above of all, the reform significantly accelerated the carrying out of procedures, due to both the amalgamation of the ordinary apostolic processes and the halving of the number of miracles to be beatified and canonized, reduced to one for each. Taking into account that the investigation could begin five years after the death of the candidate to holiness (as opposed to fifty as

1 Some "Normae servandae" (February 1983) regulate procedures for holiness enquiries.

2 On the new cause procedure see: Gutiérrez, *Studi*; Saraiva Martins, *Come si fa un santo*; Misztal, *Le cause*; Veraja, *Le cause*; Rodrigo, *Manuale*.

with previous legislation), the result was the glorification of more recently deceased figures, creating a chronological proximity of the existence of the alleged saint and the testimony of witnesses who are able to testify or not his or her exceptionalism,<sup>3</sup> and generating extremely current and applicable models for contemporary society. This favoured the decentralization process as opposed to the authority of the bishop, without which, on the one hand, restored the 'bishop's canonisation' and, on the other, deprived the Roman and papal prerogatives in force,<sup>4</sup> in a development ambivalent to compensation and balance between the centre and periphery. Moreover, it involved the Congregation of the Causes of Saints, especially in regard to beatification, in the study of the life, virtues or martyrdom of a candidate, as if the heroism of virtue, now examined historically, was the only *conditio sine qua non* for holiness, overlooking the importance of the miracle, which had already had its number of confessors reduced by half, and cancelled if the one to be blessed was a martyr. Legally speaking, these introductions to the canonisation cause system are without a doubt novel compared to those of the past, in that they bring out the procedure aimed at ascertaining sanctity from the legal-trial process in which it has been placed for centuries. As a result, the reform shifts the methodological focus from research towards a historical-critical method, with recourse to theology along with the help of modern sciences. The law does not disappear from canonisation, but is reduced to procedure, an instrument of reconciliation between the various studies and analyses.<sup>5</sup> Even within a system that had been reformed to such an extent, the pope has the power to influence the legal process. He is able to follow the most controversial candidates more closely and can prioritize causes not only based upon their progress – a cause that is coming to a close has the right to precedence – but also upon pastoral and ecclesiastical requirements. John Paul II's missionary activity, which can be seen above all in his frequent apostolic journeys and pastoral visits, often accompanied by the glorification of local personalities, saw the creation of a new practice within the canonisation system. This is to say that bureaucratic priority is given to causes relating to martyrs, to those which do not require a miracle for them to be concluded, and to those of the servants of God related to the countries that the pope intends to visit,<sup>6</sup>

3 Rusconi, "Fame di santità", 519.

4 After having opened an inquiry on a candidate for holiness, the bishop has to inform the Vatican of the process by sending the Congregation of the Causes of Saints brief information on the servant of God's life so that one can ascertain via the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that there are no obstacles to the cause. Only after having received the *nihil obstat* from Rome, can the bishop proceed.

5 See Dalla Torre, *Santità e diritto*, 148-50.

6 On Wojtyła's numerous journeys he often proclaimed new saints and blessed the causes of which were expressly accelerated. What's more, causes regarding hagiographical fig-

additional elements that show how beatifications and canonisations are answers in service of a precise 'policy'.

## 2 The 'New Evangelisation'

John Paul II used glorification to accentuate and give more resonance to the guidelines of his pontificate, to a church with a manifest presence in the life of society, aimed at a Christian renewal of the latter, with the ecclesiastical institution inevitably having to take on a leading role. His canonisation activities were inserted in the development and broader discourse of his government policy. Via his beatifications and canonisations he not only proposed archetypal figures to be imitated, or reiterated the importance of the intercessory role of the divine in the Catholic religion, but he conveyed pastoral concerns, warnings, exhortations, deposited his vision of history and the present, and identified temporary considerations and urgencies, in his on-going work of updating and contextualization of the models. The pope, therefore, favoured those candidates who appeared more responsive to the historical needs of the militant church and its ecclesiology.

There was a strong paideic reason at the root of John Paul II's recurrent use of beatifications and canonisations intended to prove that holiness is a destination accessible to all the faithful and that is not only reserved for a select few, fully embracing the legacy of the Second Vatican Council, whose constitution *Lumen Gentium* states that "all the faithful of Christ are invited to strive for the holiness and perfection of their own proper state. Indeed they have an obligation to so strive".<sup>7</sup> The pope's concept of holiness expressly based upon the conciliar reading, and to which his legitimization can be retraced, is emphasized not only in apostolic documents such as *Christifideles laici* (1988) or *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001), but also in homilies of beatification and canonisation ceremonies, in which the *Lumen Gentium* is often cited.<sup>8</sup> If the wojtylian interpretation of the Second Vatican Council regarding this specific topic can be seen as a step

ures from countries that did not yet have any, and according to new leanings, those with lay figures were given priority. See Woodward, *Making Saints*, 116-17: "Once his travel plans are firm, therefore, officials of the congregation canvass their relators and postulators to discover which candidates from the countries on his list they can ready for beatification. [...] Thus, the finished *positio* on a low-priority candidate or one from the 'wrong' country may sit for years while others are speedily judged".

<sup>7</sup> See the constitution *Lumen gentium*, 42. On the theological concept of holiness as of the Second Vatican Council, see Misztal, *Le cause*, 30-4.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Giovanni Paolo II, *Insegnamenti*, 3/2: 991 and *Insegnamenti*, 13/1: 1129. The homilies in *Insegnamenti* were transcribed in the language in which they were pronounced by the pontiff.

forward compared to his predecessors – remember that even under Paul VI the concept of holiness was tied to an elitist and exceptional dimension, and was in this sense pre-conciliar –, the ‘normalising’ reading of it, with the resulting continuous effort to add it to the tradition of the other councils of the Catholic church in order to its reformative scope, remains common practice regarding many other aspects and issues.<sup>9</sup> The universality of holiness translates to the proposal of *ad hoc* models for all types of people, for all classes, every job category, a far-reaching network disseminating the message to all walks of life. Through the highlighting of the particular apostolate and the recipients to whom the activities of the blessed or saint are dedicated, as they are raised to the honours of the altars become examples of holiness for all sectors of society, from teaching to health, from the working world to ecclesiastical circles, from the young to the elderly, aimed at covering the widest range of aspects that make up the social fabric with a strong all-encompassing tension.

Another argument that is well articulated in the canonisation policies and that is central to the entire Wojtyła’s pontificate is the concept of a church that is in perpetual *status missionis*. Renewed missionary work, as theorized in the encyclical *Redemptoris missio*,<sup>10</sup> addresses not only countries that are geographically and religiously foreign to Christianity, but also territories where the past intense evangelistic message has faded due to historical processes such as secularisation, and those places known as the “*areopagi* of the modern world”, that is, new social sectors, such as communications or scientific research. The concept of ‘new evangelisation’ was introduced by John Paul II in 1979 during his first trip to Poland, and was understood as a preaching activity that is not confined by broader global boundaries but that can be found in Europe, once originally and deeply Christian but now shaken by atheist and secular events that contested the Catholic vision of the world, its initial creation and its first driving force. Basically it had once again become mission territory. The pope theorized a broad catholicization project, which was inevitably rooted in a pessimistic view of modern reality, which hinged on the church magisterium’s claim to the role of supreme guide for civil society. The wealth of canonisations, the numerous apostolic journeys and the world missionary and youth days

9 The inevitable reference is to Miccoli, *In difesa*, 18-30. The interpretation that John Paul II gave to the Second Vatican Council, which can later be seen with Benedict XVI, is ideally synthesized in the simultaneous beatification of Pius IX and John XXIII in September 2000: whose ceremonial homily has the goal of assimilating and approaching the two papal figures, both connected to two fundamental councils such as the Vatican I and the Vatican II. In this way, see also Rusconi, “‘Santo subito’”, 11. It should be added, however, the consideration that the same varying and not fully compatible council documents are aimed at different interpretations and applications.

10 See Farina’s introduction of the encyclical in Metzler, *La Santa Sede*, 5-12.

came together in this very program, so becoming functional pastoral tools.<sup>11</sup> The homily of 14 July 1991 for the beatification of Edoardo Giuseppe Rosaz (1830-1903), bishop and founder of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Susa, proclaimed in Valle d'Aosta, is a clear example of the exhortation to mobilization and missionary action in all areas of society:

“Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Cor. 9, 16). As I wrote in the Encyclical *Redemptoris missio* (n. 1), the Church feels the urgent duty to repeat St Paul’s cry, of which the life of Bishop Rosaz becomes a fascinating example. A new evangelisation is urgent today, not reserved to a few specialists, but among all the people of God. It is your obligations, dear brother and sisters of the Christian community of Susa, to make present and active the renewing energy of the Gospel in this your valley. Become aware of this Gospel and entrust yourselves to Christ. Do not give in to the enticement of conformism and of dejection, do not withdraw into yourselves. Rather, be open and attentive to the ‘signs of the times’ of our age. To this end, rekindle your burning awareness of ‘being Church’, which makes you capable of ‘*incarnating*’ the message of salvation in your land. [...] It is to each one of you that such work is entrusted, almost as if it were a new ‘Gospel planting’, which demands a thorough and extensive catechesis of adults, a genuine witness in every part of the society.<sup>12</sup>

The fall of the Berlin Wall, and the bringing together of Europe once again as idealized by the pope,<sup>13</sup> was to redefine new evangelisation in the old continent, starting from different conditions and realities. In fact, the West had distanced itself from the church starting with the philosophy of Enlightenment, while Eastern Europe had been a victim of the Soviet totalitarian system, with the common goal of opposing individualistic, hedonistic and consumerist deviation, which was already widespread in Western democracies. If secularisation, the twentieth century ‘ideologies of evil’ – Nazism and Communism –, and religious indifference had rid European territories of their Christian past, the progressive crisis of modern doctrines and the modern world’s resulting state of confusion provided an organized and

11 Giovanni Miccoli inserts the richness and assiduity of the beatifications and canonisations into the context of the new evangelisation: Miccoli, *In difesa*, 172.

12 Giovanni Paolo II, *Insegnamenti*, 14/2: 97-8 (in Italian). English version in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 22 July 1991, 2.

13 In Wojtyła’s language, European civilization is synonymous with Christian civilization. The pontiff expressed the idea of a Europe conceived in united terms, therefore including the Eastern European countries formerly subjected to communist regimes, particularly Poland, whose national history finds its own cohesive identity in Catholicism, that is able to give strength to the presence and work of the Catholic church despite its diversity of traditions and religious conditions. Cf. Giovanni Paolo II, *Memoria e identità*.

missionary church with ample space in which to revitalize and to fulfil new ecclesial perspectives. Europe, a land that had played a primary role in the evangelisation of the whole world,<sup>14</sup> would have to, in essence, recover its Christian origins and rediscover an authentic Catholicism, without which stable equilibrium, equitable government and lasting peace would be impossible.<sup>15</sup> As the pope said: "The re-founding of European culture is the decisive and most urgent enterprise of our times [...]. This means attempting to rebuild Europe according to its true identity, which is at the root, a Christian identity".<sup>16</sup> It is into this missionary perspective that the canonisation focus and actions that John Paul II reserved for the countries of Eastern Europe throughout his pontificate, and preponderantly as of the early 1990s, were inserted. In the previous decade the pope had already made the promotion of figures relevant to the states behind the Iron Curtain central to his hagiographical strategy, with Poland in particular, being a land of saints, as a model in which Christianity has played and plays a guiding and cohesive role in national identity.<sup>17</sup> The 1982 canonisation of Maksymilian Maria Kolbe (1894-1941) and the beatification of figures like Józef Kalinowski (1835-1907) and Adam Chmielowski (1845-1916) in 1983 are examples of how evangelism toward his native country can be connected to a 'higher' providential vision that John Paul II had regarding his election and role as pontiff, as well as the future of both Christianity and of Europe.<sup>18</sup> In a continent divided into two opposing blocs and then, after the disintegration of the USSR, a Slavic or rather, Polish pope as a

14 John Paul II's speeches frequently refer to Europe as the first ground of evangelisation. For example, see the words spoken by the pope on 5 June, 1990 at a consultation meeting of the special European council of the Synod of Bishops, in Giovanni Paolo II, *Insegnamenti*, 13/1: 1515.

15 See also Miccoli, *In difesa*, 161-3.

16 Giovanni Paolo II, *Insegnamenti*, 9/1: 1379, homily of the co-celebrated mass at Sant'Apollinare in Classe on the 11 May 1986.

17 For a history of Polish Christianity: Kłoczowski, *Storia del cristianesimo*; Vaccaro, *Storia religiosa*, in particular on Poland as an outpost for the defense of Christianity and European civilization (50-2) and on the Polish saints (73-95). Interesting thoughts on the intertwining of history, holiness and martyrdom in the Polish *Weltanschauung* can be found in Rocucci, "Giovanni Paolo II".

18 See Giovanni Paolo II, *Insegnamenti*, 6/1: 1643. Kalinowski was canonized on 17 November 1991 and Chmielowski on 12 November 1989. The interest that Wojtyła showed in Chmielowski is evident from his teenage play *Brother of Our God*, in which the protagonist is none other than Adam Chmielowski. See Accattoli, *Giovanni Paolo*, 34. It should also be noted that Menozzi's open question regarding the incoherence between the importance given to heroic patriotism by beatification, which is linked to the image of a Polish Christianity that is sensitive to historical themes of nationality and identity, and the country's struggle for independence from a foreign power, and the overall vision of war and peace expressed by the pope in other occasions. See Menozzi, *Giovanni Paolo II*, 61-2. See also Menozzi, *Chiesa, pace*, 292-3.

sign for it to rediscover its identity, its historical purpose as a Christian outpost. Poland is attributed with, therefore, a messianic and propulsive purpose and is linked to the same papal ministerial function.<sup>19</sup> The exhortation to East Europe which, after the fall of the Berlin Wall underwent a phase of transformation of its institutional structures, quickly becoming critical of the Western democracies, in particular their pro-abortion and anti-family policies, serving as a warning of possible social deviations, and all the more the freedom which had just been won by defeating a totalitarian regime whose government structures had distanced themselves from ethical and ecclesiastical precepts. If the pope had as far back as 1991, the encyclical *Centesimus annus*, warned of the need for a sound and authentic democracy,<sup>20</sup> the subsequent and progressive failure of the European Christian revival and the general spread of religiously indifferent practices and moral relativism even in Eastern Europe's most recent democracies would only exacerbate the tones in the denunciation of the evils of Western legal systems, accelerating the church's entrenchment in the defence of its right to legislate on moral issues and its rejection of the contemporary world.<sup>21</sup>

The beatifications and canonisations both reflect and amplify certain issues. In June 1991, on his first trip to Poland after the Soviet regime had come to an end, John Paul II beatified Rafał Chyliński (1694-1741), a convent Franciscan in Łódź.<sup>22</sup> In the ceremonial homily there is an insistence on the 'European origins' of the country. Since freedom owes as much to Western Europe as secularisation and its tragic twentieth century descendants do, there was an urgent need for a 'new evangelisation' to dust off and galvanize its Christian origins:

This land, this Polish land in the middle of Europe, a land marked by the tradition of European matrix. I say it again because both here and abroad people are repeating this humiliating argument that only now can we enter Europe. Rather, we must reflect well upon the European situation and what it means to be European. People should remember that the focal point of freedom was brought to Europe by St Paul [...]. Certainly, if Christ is put

19 Miccoli, *In difesa*, 184.

20 English version: John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*.

21 Cf. Menozzi, *Giovanni Paolo II*, 39-41.

22 For more on the June 1991 trip to Poland and on the Pope's focus on the pitfalls of freedom unleashed from morals see Weigel, *Witness*, 641-4: "There seemed to be a disconnection between the people's expectations and the Pope's intentions. Poles expected John Paul to share their sense of liberation, but the Pope's addresses tended to focus on the pitfalls of a freedom detached from moral norms [...]. Poles wanted to celebrate their new freedom with the man to whom they attributed a major role in their liberation. The prescient Pope, already focused on the difficulties ahead, was somewhat out of sync with the popular mood". See also Felak, "Pope John Paul II".

on a shelf and perhaps even left completely out of the situation, God does not exist any more either. As Creator, God can be very distant – a Creator who as no right to intervene in human life, in human history. We live, therefore, as if God does not exist. This also part of the European spirit, of the modern European tradition. We must reflect very deeply about the many things being European means. The Second Vatican Council considered that other spirit of Europe. This spirit does not belong to Europe alone, but nevertheless this spirit had its cradle here in Europe, our continent, and here it has also reached its most tragic points, which we remember because they belong to this century; [...] Therefore we speak always of the need for a new evangelisation. After the Second Vatican Council this awareness was born and this need for a new evangelisation of this old continent, of its ancient societies, its Christian societies.<sup>23</sup>

The pastoral concern that Wojtyła showed regarding the countries liberated from communism can also be seen in its full extent in the homily of the beatification of Adolph Kolping (1813-1865) on 27 October 1991, in Rome. Kolping, a nineteenth-century German priest who was a firm supporter of the working class, became an example to the former Soviet republics when taking on new Christian-inspired governmental systems.<sup>24</sup> Kolping was celebrated as “precursor of the great social Encyclicals” in the centenary year of the *Rerum novarum* and it highlights the valorisation of the family in an attempt to return to the ethical values of which the church is the guarantor.<sup>25</sup>

Towards the end of the pontificate one is witness to the pope's bitter and growing awareness that his plans to rebuild a lasting Christian society, even in these new democracies, had failed and fallen in line with the Western capitalist model instead. The beatification of Stefan Wincenty Frelichowski (1913-1945) on June 7 1999 in Toruń, Pomerania, and those of Zygmunt Szczęśny Feliński (1822-1895), Jan Balicki (1869-1948), Jan Beyzym (1850 -1912) and Sancja Szymkowiak (1910-1942) in Krakow on 18 August 2002 lay bare all the humiliation of the modern world's apostasy, by then having reached the east, and the impossibility of an authentic balance being struck. In particular, the first ceremony, accompanied by an act of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus,<sup>26</sup> took place on the pope's eighth

23 Giovanni Paolo II, *Insegnamenti*, 14/1: 1626-1634 (in Polish). English version in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 24 June 1991, 10.

24 A brief mention of Adolph Kolping and to his social activity can be found in Menozzi, *Li avrete sempre*, 125-6.

25 Giovanni Paolo II, *Insegnamenti*, 14/2: 1013-16 (in Italian).

26 The celebration of the beatifications and canonisations linked to the devotion to the Sacred Heart and the Christ the King celebrations is fairly common and suggests a connection with the politicization of the nineteenth and twentieth century devotions and hagiographical figures. One also should not forget that in 1992 John Paul II canonized Claude de

trip to Poland and is imbued in an atmosphere of penance and absolution for the approaching jubilee year. The tone is as pessimistic as is the rejection of certain political and social systems that have abandoned the principles of Christ that guarantee a just peace.<sup>27</sup> The second beatification is however celebrated on the occasion of the dedication of a shrine to the Divine Mercy on the pope's ninth and last visit to his native country. If in previous years, the pope's speeches addressing Poland contained subtle criticism or open attacks on communism, here the accusation is no longer aimed at that now defeated system, but more and more explicitly towards Western liberal democracies, bearers of relativism, "freedom without truth or responsibility", and false independence. The homily is presented as a discouraged reflection on twentieth century:

God has chosen our own times for this purpose. Perhaps because the twentieth century, despite indisputable achievements in many areas, was marked in a particular way by the "mystery of iniquity". With this heritage both of good and of evil, we have entered the new millennium. New prospects of development are opening up before mankind, together with hitherto unheard-of dangers. Frequently man lives as if God did not exist, and even puts himself in God's place. He claims for himself the Creator's right to interfere in the mystery of human life. He wishes to determine human life through genetic manipulation and to establish the limit of death. Rejecting divine law and moral principles, he openly attacks the family. In a variety of ways he attempts to silence the voice of God in human hearts; he wishes to make God the "great absence" in the culture and the conscience of peoples. The "mystery of iniquity" continues to mark the reality of the world. In experiencing this mystery, man lives in fear of the future, of emptiness, of suffering, of annihilation.<sup>28</sup>

The dire consequences of a godless man, that only unjust societies such as the modern ones can create because it rejects the divine laws, betrays of the family, attentive to life and manipulation, become the recurrent admonishment to be proposed to the faithful and to the world.

La Colombière. Daniele Menozzi, in his articulated speech concerning Wojtyła's judgement of history, recognizes that the pope, in contrast with the Enlightenment, does not renounce encouraging, at least at first, the Sacred Heart's devotion, closely linked to the Christ, and the King celebration, according to a typical intransigent Catholicism scheme. See Menozzi, *Sacro Cuore; Giovanni Paolo II*, 32.

27 Giovanni Paolo II, *Insegnamenti*, 22/1: 1240-46 (in Polish). En. transl. URL <https://goo.gl/5XZY5g> (2018-05-07).

28 Giovanni Paolo II, *Insegnamenti*, 25/2: 178 (in Polish). En. transl. URL <https://goo.gl/WMqAkj> (2018-05-07).

### 3 The Ethical Prerogative

John Paul II provided his own vision and solution to the problems of canonisations and beatifications of particular hagiographical figures or those which occurred in specific historical circumstances, instilling them with a critical and admonitory function towards anything that distanced itself from the teaching of Christian morality as presented by the Catholic church. At the same time, the claim to a more important role in the field of ethics for the ecclesiastical magisterium, with which one aligns, as previously stated, the accusation of the secularised West, is also expressed through this tool. In this sense it is interesting to follow the changing perspectives through hagiographical figures. If until 1989 it was communism that threatened the peace and unity of Christian Europe, in the years that followed it was the Western world, in which materialism, consumerism, permissiveness, and hedonism reign that became that destabilizing element and was increasingly the subject of the ecclesiastical magisterium's explicit accusations. Criticism of those systems became more and more intense as they moved away from that "healthy secularism" and "true democracy" which recognized the Catholic church and the papal ministry as guarantors and interpreters of the doctrines and standards of ethical and social behaviour. From this point of view, the defence is joined to new evangelisation, which is also the recovery and support of human dignity and the right to life. With ever increasing intensity, the accusation of Western democracies became attacks on leanings alleged to infringe human rights, included in legislation regarding abortion, euthanasia and genetics, in an ever more negative view of contemporary society, while barricading oneself behind "dogmatic ethical principles". The encyclical *Evangelium vitae* (1995), which is a hard line papal message regarding personal inviolability against euthanasia and abortion – the "atrocious crime" that is called "right" under modern state legislation – is symbolic of the development of this thought.<sup>29</sup> The Western systems were considered harmful because they had abandoned the ecclesiastical directives and embraced ethical relativism, and were put in the same category as totalitarianism, having been generated by the same historical development and bearers of the same tragic consequences. Their moral de-legitimization seems to be a legacy of uncompromising culture, like the renewed distance between the rights of God and human rights as can be found between the lines of the aforementioned *Evangelium vitae*.<sup>30</sup> The most explicit references to

29 En. transl. URL <https://goo.gl/L21xx1> (2018-05-07).

30 The very notion of 'human rights' is no longer universal for men of different religious and ethical guidelines. In the *Evangelium vitae* Menozzi identifies an important stage in the end of parallelism of the discourse on human rights between the church and the United Nations and in the fulfillment of the shift of ecclesiastical priorities from religious freedom

abortion and euthanasia can be found in the context of the beatifications of Edith Stein (1891-1942), 1 May 1987, and Rupert Mayer (1876-1945), 3 May of the same year, on the pope's visit to the Federal Republic of Germany, which saw the pontiff urging the Münster faithful's opposition:

Today again there are powerful forces in society that pose a threat to human life. Euthanasia, mercy-killing ostensibly on ground of human sympathy, is again pronounced with alarming frequency and finds new misled champions. Nor can the Church remain silent on the question of abortion, which has been almost completely decontrolled in your and many other countries. Of course, through its priests and laity it will show sympathy towards every pregnant woman who finds herself in difficulty, and provide actual help where possible. But towards society the Church cannot remain silent, even when a simple, honest discussion of the current situation with regard to abortion is rejected as troublesome meddling with a taboo. The Church expects help from politicians and leaders of public opinion who feel bound by moral principles, even the Christian faith, so that the findings of embryological and psychological work in connection with pregnancy and abortion will have a growing influence on practical, personal decisions. The abortion law and its application should once again be reviewed without prejudice to see whether it does not, rather than protect life, actually encourage many people in their misguided belief that abortion is an almost inconsequential matter, that it is indeed permissible in itself, particularly as the one procuring the abortion doesn't even have to pay for it. Today, too, the Church must with clarity and patience strongly uphold the right to life of everyone, especially of those not yet born who therefore need special protection.<sup>31</sup>

In Berlin a few years later, on 23 June 1996, the beatification of Bernhard Lichtenberg (1875-1943) and Karl Leisner (1915-1945) – two priests who were martyrs of the resistance to the Nazi regime – became an occasion to underline the risks of religious indifference and consumerism. In a ceremony dedicated to the victims of National Socialism, the pope's subtle hint that “not only political dictators limit freedom” creates a conceptual coming together of capitalist state structures and totalitarianism.<sup>32</sup> The principles of Nazi ideology, against which the two *beati* took up the fight, closely resemble instances of secularist societies. The consideration con-

to life itself. See Menozzi, *Giovanni Paolo II*, 41-5, 49. See also Menozzi, “Legge naturale”; *Chiesa e diritti umani*, 235-58.

**31** Address to people of Münster: Giovanni Paolo II. *Insegnamenti*, 10/2: 1053-4 (in German). En. transl. in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 18 May 1987, 22. Cf. Miccoli, *In difesa*, 178.

**32** Giovanni Paolo II, *Insegnamenti*, 19/1: 1592 (in German).

tinued and became clearer when the pontiff recalled not only the defeat, through faith and martyrdom, of Nazism, but also the need to fight against all that, similarly, goes against dignity human:

Bernhard Lichtenberg knew quite well that wherever God's truth is no longer heeded, human dignity also suffers. Wherever falsehood reigns, false and evil behaviour also rules. "A person's actions are the consequences of his principles. When his principles are false, his actions will not be correct... I fight against false principles, which necessarily give rise to false actions", he wrote in the minutes of his first appearance before the Nazi judges. And he clearly and emphatically called some of these false principles by name: "The elimination of religious instruction in the schools; struggle against the Cross; the secularisation of marriage, deliberate killing of those whose lives were supposedly not worth living (euthanasia), persecution of the Jews..." [...] Like the two blessed, we are all called to bear witness to life. Therefore hold fast to the life which is Christ. Resist the culture of hatred and death, regardless of the guise which it may assume. Do not grow tired of dedicating yourselves to those whose life and dignity is threatened: the unborn, the terminally ill, the elderly and the many needy people of our world. By their death Bernhard Lichtenberg and Karl Leisner made visible the life that is Christ, and which Christ gives. The Church will always honour them and their witness.<sup>33</sup>

The hagiographical figure that best represents the papal leanings regarding the right to life is Gianna Beretta Molla (1922-1962), who was beatified on 24 April 1994 and then canonized amid heated controversy on 16 May 2004.<sup>34</sup> Beretta Molla is depicted as a strong mother figure as heroic as she was questionable in the extremity of her choices. Her life itself encompassed a message aimed primarily at women: born in Magenta in 1922, she served in the *Azione Cattolica* and *Conferenze di San Vincenzo* before graduating in medicine and surgery at the University of Pavia in 1949. In 1950, Beretta Molla opened a medical clinic in Mesero near Magenta, and specialized in paediatrics in Milan. She got married in 1955 and had already had three children when, in September 1961, towards the end of the second month of her fourth pregnancy, she was diagnosed with uterine fibroids and decided not to undergo treatment and complete the gestation, thus determining her own death. On the one hand, Beretta Molla seems to

33 Giovanni Paolo II, *Insegnamenti*, 19/1: 1593 (in German). En. transl. URL <https://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/JP960623.HTM> (2018-05-07).

34 Gianna Beretta Molla was beatified with Elisabetta Canori Mora (1774-1825) and Isidoro Bakanja (1880-1909) and canonized with Luigi Orione (1872-1940), Annibale Maria di Francia (1851-1927), Nimatullah Kassab Al-Hardini (1808-1858) and Paola Elisabetta Cerioli (1816-1865). See, of numerous hagiobiographies: Molla, Guerriero, *Santa Gianna Beretta*.

be an authentically secular woman living out her daily sanctity of family and work just like any other wife and mother, while on the other her radical decision to die rather than have an abortion, and in so doing giving her life as a wife and educator of her other children, places her in opposition to collective sentiment and somewhat distant from the concept of freedom as expressed by the secularised civil consortium. In the canonisation homily, the pontiff also seems to have wanted to further radicalize the message, interpreting the action of the novel saint almost as a holy duty dictated by conjugal love, in that she “remained heroically faithful to the commitment made on her wedding day”.<sup>35</sup> Another of John Paul II’s significant interventions took place on 19 October 2003, when on World Mission Sunday in Rome, he beatified Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997), a figure of extraordinary social apostolate for the poor and of global resonance – so much so that in December 1998, less than two years after her death, the pope had responded affirmatively to the early opening of the canonisation process due to the widespread fame of her holiness and the grace felt around the world for her intervention.<sup>36</sup> In the form of a personal reminiscence, the homily expressly mentions the newly blessed’s position on the right to life:

I remember, for example, her pro-life and anti-abortion interventions, even when she was awarded the Nobel Prize for peace (Oslo, 10 December 1979). She often used to say: “If you hear of some woman who does not want to keep her child and wants to have an abortion, try to persuade her to bring him to me. I will love that child, seeing in him the sign of God’s love”.<sup>37</sup>

By introducing the issue of abortion even in such a short homiletic presentation, while leaving out many other aspects that could be considered more characteristic of his personality and activity, he seems to be attempting to ride the media wave that such an approach can bring in focusing attention on such an urgent and pressing issue.<sup>38</sup>

35 Giovanni Paolo II, *Insegnamenti*, 27/1: 619 (in Italian). See Ciciliot, “Heritage Talks”, 273-6.

36 Ciciliot, “Una santa”.

37 Giovanni Paolo II, *Insegnamenti*, 27/1: 617-18 (in Italian). English version at <https://goo.gl/xttkZo> (July 2017).

38 On the ‘biopolicy’ of the Catholic church see: Turina, *La Santa Sede*, 359-62; *Chiesa e biopolitica*, and Betta, “La biopolitica”.

## 4 Christian Unity

John Paul II also used canonisation and beatification as tools of ecumenical possibility. On a doctrinal level, the traditional ambivalence seems to prevail in his magisterium, an ambivalence that the Second Vatican Council had already tried in vain to overcome, one that included the claim that the Catholic church was the only custodian and interpreter of the truth as taught by Christ and the invitation to other churches to look for the true divine message, that was deficient and imperfect in both parties, together. As a matter of fact the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's declaration *Dominus Iesus*, signed by Cardinal Ratzinger in September 2000, reaffirmed "that the Church of Christ, despite the divisions which exist among Christians, continues to exist fully only in the Catholic Church",<sup>39</sup> explicitly reproducing the intransigent pre-conciliar scheme.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, despite the presence of, within John Paul II's speeches and even in his homilies, frequent calls for unity amongst Christians and lamentations about divisions, the boosting of the pope's role as universal pastor indirectly incited a Roman centralism that has been typical of Catholicism over the recent centuries and that has always stifled ecumenical dialogue. John Paul II's numerous public gestures concerning ecumenism seem to be aimed at a dialogue based not so much on the theological issue as the need for peace and brotherhood – of which the meetings of Assisi are the clearest example – often dictated by a dramatic, whimsical and contingent pastoral urgency. Wojtyła's canonisation policy mirrors this. It offers hagiographical figures that are historically ill suited to a real bringing together of Christian denominations, in which the awareness of introducing embarrassing personalities in ecumenical dialogue can be found in their homiletic presentations, that are often anticipated or followed by an observation about not wanting to reopening old wounds, the end of discord between Christians and the hope of communion. As early as the first decade of his pontificate, on 22 November 1987, Wojtyła beatified George Haydock (1557-1584) and 84 companions († 1584-1679) among whom priests and lay people from England, Scotland and Wales, who were martyrs for the unity of the Catholic church and fidelity to the Bishop of Rome, in the historical context of the religious wars that had erupted in Britain following the founding of the Anglican church and its 'protestantisation'. Despite the homiletic text stating that the renewal to which the church was called was a culmination of the "work for that *unity among Christians* for which Christ himself prayed", and despite its reference to

39 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration Dominus Iesus*.

40 For a short but effective summary on John Paul II's ecumenism, see Miccoli, "Tra vecchio e nuovo", 11-13.

both the “progress made in the intervening years towards fuller communion between *Anglicans and Catholics*” and to “other Christians who died for their beliefs”,<sup>41</sup> Anglicanism is perceived as a sort of setback. Again, 21 May 1995 saw the canonisation, in Olomouc in the Czech Republic, of Jan Sarkander (1576-1620),<sup>42</sup> who was an evangelizer and martyr from Bohemia put to death by the Protestant authorities during religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. The evangelical church considered the sanctification provocative, so much so that some of its representatives did not attend the meeting with the Pope the day before in Prague, and protests were organized in memory of Protestants killed by Catholics.<sup>43</sup> The pontiff responded in his homily with a plea for forgiveness:

His canonisation first of all gives honour to *all those in this century, not only in Moravia and Bohemia but throughout Eastern Europe, who preferred the loss of property, marginalization and death, rather than submit to oppression and violence*. This canonisation must in no way reopen painful wounds, which in the past marked the Body of Christ in these lands. On the contrary, today I, the Pope of the Church of Rome, in the name of all Catholics, *ask forgiveness* for the wrongs inflicted on non-Catholics during the turbulent history of these peoples; at the same time *I pledge* the Catholic Church's *forgiveness* for whatever harm her sons and daughters suffered.<sup>44</sup>

A similar scene took place in Košice, Slovakia, on 2 July 1995 at the sanctification of Marko Križevčanin (1588-1619), Istvan Pongrácz (1582-1619) and Melchior Grodziecky (1584-1619), who were three martyrs of the religious conflict with the Protestants. Once again, the proclamation caused much discontentment amongst the evangelicals, who came together under the monument in memory of their victims in Presov. In the canonisation homily the pope recalled the value of Protestant martyrs and that evening went to pray at the persecuted Calvinists' mausoleum, an important gesture that would most certainly attract media coverage.<sup>45</sup> Even more controversial

41 Giovanni Paolo II, *Insegnamenti*, 10/3: 1180-4 (in English).

42 Canonized with Zdislava of Lemberk, Jan Sarkander was beatified on 6 May 1860 by Pius IX. See s.v. “Jan (Giovanni) Sarkander”.

43 See Accattoli, *Giovanni Paolo*, 264. Mistakenly here, but also for the martyrs of Košice, the Vaticanist speaks of beatification in places of canonisation.

44 Giovanni Paolo II, *Insegnamenti*, 18/1: 1362-7 (in Czech). En. transl. in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 24 May 1995, 2.

45 Accattoli, *Giovanni Paolo*, 265. One should note that the Author exalts both of the pontificate's gestures: that of Olomouc is “the most beautiful of his requests for forgiveness” and that of Košice is “the most humble and most unexpected of the ecumenic acts”.

was the beatification on 6 October 1996 of Wincenty Lewoniuk (1849-1874) and his 12 companions († 1874), Ukrainian farmers who were united with Rome (Union of Brest) and persecuted by the Russian tsar who intended to eliminate the Ukrainian Catholic church,<sup>46</sup> an issue which is part of the endemic problem in relations between Rome and Moscow on the Ukrainian question. If the Russian Orthodox church wanted to suppress the united churches and the passing of the Ukrainian faithful to the Latin or orthodox rite, John Paul II claimed religious freedom in that territory, and did not see the support of the Ukrainian Catholic church as a contradiction of ecumenical dialogue in the reconstruction of unity.<sup>47</sup> After 1989, with the backing of the Ukrainian ex-communist authorities, the long vexed united church, whose position had been occupied during the dictatorship by the Orthodox Russians, was also restored by the communist regime. The tension created between the two Christian denominations in that area was certainly not dampened by the proposal of the nineteenth-century Ukrainian martyrs in a context that was extremely reminiscent of that coeval with the beatification and the veiled restatement of the idea of a Rome that was united with other Christian churches could only be realized in terms of a 'return' on the part of those who had previously strayed. John Paul II also tried to build a dialogue with other Christian denominations through what could be called 'martyrdom ecumenism'. The 1994 apostolic letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* laid out the main themes of 2000's big Jubilee, including the rediscovery of martyrdom and the perspective of the Christian churches' communion. The attention that this type of holiness attracted was then solidified in the creation of a special body, the Commission of the New Martyrs, who also went by the broader name of 'witnesses of the faith', that were tasked with remembering the Christians who had been killed for their beliefs over the course of the twentieth century. Their work consisted of collecting and cataloguing the numerous experiences not so much for the canonical process as for disclosure, or to better show how martyrdom is still an important and concrete reality.<sup>48</sup> The experience of the new twentieth century martyrs was not only presented as an element of Catholic heritage, but of the whole Christian *ecumene*, including the Orthodox, Protestants and Anglicans. On 7 May 2000 at their commemoration held in front of that symbol of Imperial Rome, the Coliseum, in order to signify its link to the early Christian martyrs, John Paul II reiterated that:

46 See the articles of the Pratulín martyrs in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 Ottobre 1996, 7: Jan Wiktor Nowak, "La grande testimonianza di chi offre la vita per la fede"; Franciszek Jachimiuk, "Quando il coraggio di gente comune diviene esempio per un intero popolo"; Józef Szajda, "Una preziosa eredità da tutelare".

47 See Riccardi, *Il Vaticano*, 359-65.

48 Riccardi, *Il secolo del martirio*, 10-11.

the precious heritage which these courageous witnesses have passed down to us is a patrimony shared by all the Churches and Ecclesial Communities. It is a heritage which speaks more powerfully than all the causes of division. The ecumenism of the martyrs and the witnesses to the faith is the most convincing of all; to the Christians of the twenty-first century it shows the path to unity. It is the heritage of the Cross lived in the light of Easter: a heritage which enriches and sustains Christians as they go forward into the new millennium.<sup>49</sup>

The collective memory of these witnesses, a theme of great concern to the pope due to his own past being interwoven with martyrdom linked to Nazism and communism, intervenes in the shaping of the Catholic church and its identity and places it in confrontation with modernity. The pope seems to have launched the message of the 'new martyrs' at the threshold of the third millennium as a reading of the entire history of the twentieth century, as if they were the protagonists of the passing century permitting solution and providing interpretation.<sup>50</sup> These images also introduce the dimension of forgiveness to the process of remembering – it is in fact the martyr who absolves the persecutor – in this way becoming part of another of the Wojtyła pontificate's central themes, that of the purification of memory through repentance.<sup>51</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

John Paul II used beatifications and canonisations as instruments of ecclesial governance, adapting them to serve not only pastoral and theological uses and priorities but also political and social. The customary solemnity and pomp of the glorification ceremonies – one only has to think of these collective celebrations in which hundreds of new hagiographical figures are presented, consequently favouring the group over the individual, form over content and symbolism over meaning –,<sup>52</sup> along with the pilgrimages and large prayer meetings –, all contribute to in shaping the image of a pope who was presented as a strong media figure with much attention to detail, a lover of spectacle and huge crowds. It was precisely his long

49 Giovanni Paolo II, *Insegnamenti*, 2000, 23/1: 776 (in Italian). En. transl. URL <https://goo.gl/w1Laen> (2018-06-07).

50 Interesting points can be found in Roccucci, "Giovanni Paolo II", 219-34.

51 Cf. Miccoli, *In difesa*, 197-223; Menozzi, *Giovanni Paolo II*, 127-63.

52 Giancarlo Zizola introduces the issue of the canonisations from the point of view of a media communication strategy and use of media space aimed at involving the masses. See Zizola, *L'altro Wojtyła*, 164, 165-6.

and continuous exposure to the media that influenced the “collective and public canonisation process enshrined in life and inscribed in [his] death”,<sup>53</sup> in response to the popular will for instant sanctification and the immediate opening of the beatification process.

John Paul II responded to modern society through the saints, and his canonisation policy mirrors his relationship with it. The pope adapted the traditional instrument of canonisation to the needs of the modernity, but alongside anti-modern elements. That is to say, on one side canonisations prove to be a renewed effective tool with a strong impact on media, leveraging consensus across the social strata; on the other side the proposed hagiographical models clearly show the resumption of the structural elements of ultramontanism, such as a pessimistic viewpoint (crisis of the family as a result of hedonism, crisis of the economy as a result of unbridled capitalism, crisis of the political structures as a result of the de-ethicization), heteronomy, and the claim of moral primacy of the ecclesiastical institutions. As a result, John Paul II's fight against abortion and his campaign for the defense of life, in addition to his other bio-political claims, reflect not only a personal conviction, but they are entirely coherent with this traditional vision of the world and the role of the church. In essence, it seems that languages and forms are updated, but the content is not. Thus, the effort was towards catholicizing modernity, rather than the opposite – modernizing Catholicity –, or alternatively putting the two dimensions in dialogue with each other. Beatifications and canonisations certainly did not play a secondary role in the wojtylian attempt to strengthen the pope's primacy and augment the power of the universal church over the local churches, leaving a deep legacy to the global Catholicism.

53 Boesch Gajano, “L'immagine”, 65.

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