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Historians and non-scholars alike have long regarded the work of President Reagan and Pope John Paul II to be a tremendous force in helping to end the Cold War. In 1992, *Time Magazine* cited the relationship as a “Holy Alliance”, a political partnering of two men who, after surviving separate assassination attempts merely six weeks apart, saw their role in global politics as a divine signal to promote the free world and take down communism internationally.

By the time the President and the Pope first met at the Vatican in 1982, the two were privately discussing Cold War politics. They agreed that communism was a threat to human rights and global stability, and that it should be confronted. John Paul II and Reagan were clearly aligned in their abhorrence for communism, but they had differing primary goals; the Pope strived to introduce democracy to his native Poland, and Reagan was occupied with the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Thus, the two world leaders were able to team up not out of necessity, but out of mutual benefit. It was an alliance of convenience, with two governing organizations able to use one another’s global power and influences to promote their own political goals. Indeed, the President and the Pope shared Cold War information, but never intimately planned or initiated policy to jointly bring about democratic reform throughout the globe.

My research project concentrates on the Washington-Vatican relationship during the Reagan years and how the partnership helped defeat communism, with particular attention paid to the Pope’s native Poland. I also explore the role the alliance has formed in the years since Reagan left office, presenting ideas that may counter what many people have assumed about the relationship between President Reagan and Pope John Paul II.

A President Sleeps

The meeting began as any other political conference would. It was June 7, 1982, and US President Ronald Reagan was visiting with Pope John Paul II to officially discuss events unfolding in the Middle East. Israel had invaded Lebanon the previous day, and US and Vatican officials planned to discuss the matter with one other in the Holy City.

With 50 minutes to spend in solitude, Pope John Paul II and President Reagan had unlimited access to one another. Full diplomatic relations with the Vatican had not yet been established in the United States, and the meeting represented a growing interest in reaching to the Pope as a valuable American political strategy.

Though the official agenda predicted conversation on the Israeli invasion, the two men quickly moved onto matters they felt more urgent. The Soviet Union was still a prominent threat to the Western world, and communism held a dominating presence in Eastern Europe, most notably – for this case – in Poland, the Pope’s native country. With similar interest in destroying communism and establishing democracy throughout the globe, President Reagan and Pope John Paul II held the opportunity to align with one another and create a commanding coalition, generating a political influence so powerful it could potentially prompt revolution and alter global affairs forever.

The meeting was celebrated shortly afterward with a ceremony televised live throughout the world. The press conference seemed to be as normal as others the President had participated in. This time, however, Reagan continued to doze off; “While the Pope read his long statement in the stuffy, hot papal library, Mr. Reagan could be seen fidgeting, blinking his eyes and jerking his head in an apparent struggle to stay awake” (Weisman, “Pope, Italians...”, para. 10).

Years later, in reviewing the trend of some prominent politicians snoozing through important gatherings, then-reporter for the *New York Times* Maureen Dowd referred to the event as a classic. She wrote that “White House staff members recall clustering around the television back home, cheering [Reagan] on to win one for the Napper: ‘Hang in there, Dutch, you can do it! Just a few more minutes!’” (Dowd, para. 10).

Reagan’s nap, which was relatively harmless to the political alliance, is symbolic of the US and Vatican relationship with regards to the Cold War. It was an exciting time for the two entities to meet and brainstorm political strategies and voice their support for the free world. The union promised great success in ending the Cold War, and, indeed, historians today point to the coalition as a valuable tool in defeating Soviet-controlled communism.

The relationship, however, is strongly tied to the personal goals of the two men. Reagan and the Pope both hoped to topple communism and promote democratic rule based on the concept of innate and inalienable human rights. Nevertheless, shared goals stemmed from separate reasoning. The President held a strong conviction against the Soviet Union, advocating for nuclear arms buildup as a way to intimidate the enemy and prompt the superpower to invest in a defense budget it could not support, eventually leading the nation to collapse. The Pope detested communist rule in his native Poland, where Marxist thought promoted by the Soviet Union threatened to create godless nations throughout the globe and eradicate religious belief. This prompted the two to view the Cold War through separate lenses, bringing separate understanding of global affairs to the relationship.

Thus, when the diplomatic partnership between the two governing bodies was officially established in 1984, it was not out of demanding necessity in world politics. It was, in fact, an alliance of convenience. The US and the Vatican would be able to strategically work with one another's influence to help bring down Soviet-influenced communism throughout the globe.

Scholars and non-scholars alike dramatically envision that “working closely with President Ronald Reagan of the United States, the Holy See exerted sufficient pressure on the communist bloc,” eventually helping to peacefully defeat the Soviet Union and bring democracy to Eastern Europe (Kent, pp. 67). Indeed, an important political relationship was established between the United States and the Catholic Church that helped promote ideas of the free world to the international community during the Reagan years. The Cold War experience of these two governing bodies, however, is contrary to that teamwork façade that is commonly imagined.

President Reagan and Pope John Paul II never intimately planned or initiated policy to jointly bring about democratic reform throughout the globe. As one US official said after the fall of the Soviet Union, “Like all great and lucky leaders, the Pope and the President exploited the forces of history to their own ends” (Bernstein, pp. 3). The President, indeed, was able to sleep through much of the alliance, while still adopting the full benefits of the Pope's global Catholic influence.

One Man Moves a Nation

Poland had already begun to stir with hints of revolution by the 1970s. The Soviet Union continued to keep a close watch on the nation, particularly after a 1970 revolt that

lead to the installation of a new government headed by communist politician Edward Gierek.

As the decade moved forward, the quality of life for Poles experienced an increase. Wages and social security payments were raised; prices stabilized; agricultural and industrial rates were higher than they had been in years. By 1974, half of Poland's exports were being shipped to countries in the Western world (Calvocoressi, pp. 253). For a time, Gierek was considered a miracle-worker.

However, this era of improvement did not last long. In 1976, prices skyrocketed and protests broke into the streets, resulting in numerous deaths, injuries, and arrests. Throughout the next few years, "abuse of office and officially tolerated corruption spread, intensifying as the Polish economy fell into a state of collapse" (Kolankiewicz, pp. 1). The riots continued. The Poles had experienced a taste – however mild – of life without the complete and total control of Soviet-style communism, and they wanted more.

By the time the plane carrying Pope John Paul II landed in Poland on June 2, 1979, crowds numbering the thousands had already gathered to welcome him home. The nation was buzzing with electricity as people "[flocked] to him like rock fans afflicted with Beatlemania" ("A Triumphant Return", pp. 1).

Tensions remained high in Poland at the time, as "Gierek's task was becoming beyond his powers and the industrial workers were moving, albeit cautiously, towards another confrontation with the government" (Calvocoressi, pp. 254). Indeed, the nation in 1979 was experiencing a bad harvest season, and the debt to foreign trading partners was

proving unmanageable. At a time of drastic economic emergency and political distress, Pope John Paul II was a welcome and exciting visitor.

Karol Wojtyla, who had been chosen Pope only one year previous, was the first non-Italian leader since the early 1500s to serve as Supreme Pontiff. Thus, his role took on dramatic contexts within the realm of Cold War politics. As the head of a church with 700 million followers worldwide, Pope John Paul II had a commanding influence over Roman Catholics in every nation, including those dominated by communist rule.

Pope John Paul II's political authority was particularly evident in his 1979 trip to Poland. *Time* magazine reported in a cover story on the awe-inspiring reaction the Pole's had to the Roman Catholic leader's visit:

“...several hundred thousand worshipers, at a single hand gesture of the Pope, sank to the earth, like a field of instantly scythed wheat, to pray. Charisma was not the word to describe what had happened.... [The Pope] stirred an outpouring of trust and affection that no political leader in today's world could hope to inspire, let alone command” (“A Triumphant Return”, pp. 2).

Media coverage of the event was similar throughout Western nations, which noted the massive, jubilant crowds as a sign of frustration under communist rule. Journalists from democratic nations noted the significance of Roman Catholic support in a communist country, but were hesitant to trumpet the trip as an immediate end to cold war politics. A *New York Times* editorial on June 5, 1979, indicated that Pope John Paul II in visiting his homeland would “reinvigorate and reinspire the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, [but] does not threaten the political order of the nation or of Eastern Europe” (“The Polish Pope in Poland”, para. 5). Other publications echoed the observation.

Indeed, the Pope's 1979 visit did not immediately tear down the wall of communism. It did, however, plant the seeds for such a feat. John Paul II's trip to Poland "ignited a revolution of conscience in east-central Europe that gave birth within 13 months to the Solidarity movement, and inspired similar eruptions of civil resistance throughout the Warsaw Pact" (Weigel, para. 6). Despite the efforts of communist governments throughout Eastern Europe to downplay the Pope's voyage, the excitement over his arrival was internationally undeniable.

The Poles were immediately stirred and moved toward action. When the Pope publicly called for Catholic freedom throughout the nation and a stronger role for the Church to help determine Poland's future, the Polish people listened. By the time the trip was complete, the new Pope "emerged from his triumphant visit to Poland as a dramatic and compelling personality on the international scene. John Paul will surely have something of his own to say about the principles and powers of his era" ("A Triumphant Return", pp. 10). The Catholic Church would become an effective channel for the Polish people to concentrate their battle against the Soviet Union, a superpower nation and historical enemy associated with the Orthodox Church.

Solidarity Begins

After experiencing the papal tour of Poland in 1979, many of the people throughout the nation caught on to the energy of a movement toward freedom, and thus Solidarity was born. Forming in 1980, Solidarity became the first independent trade union in a communist nation.

In August 1980, during an occupational strike of the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk, a man illegally climbed to the top of the Shipyard wall to address the crowd, in effect becoming the face and leader of the Solidarity movement. The man was Lech Wałęsa, a labor union activist who would become the most important and famous figure in the battle against communism in Poland.

With tremendous support within Poland and throughout the world, the pressure was on the Polish government to address Solidarity. The group was eventually able to sign the Gdansk Agreement with the government, granting the organization the right to strike. The agreement also implemented a new leader, ousting Gierek with Stanisław Kania as First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party.

Throughout the next few months, the Solidarity movement gained enormous strength. Despite efforts from the Polish communist government to downplay the formation of the labor union, word of the organization's success spread quickly through oral communication and Radio Free Europe broadcasts. Soon, Solidarity had its own legislation and delegation, with Wałęsa serving as president.

Solidarity demanded a number of actions from its government, the first group to take such a dramatic public in a communist country. Solidarity called for new and legal labor unions, less censorship by the government, and amnesty granted to political prisoners, among other goals. To the Western world, the goals reflected public distaste of life under a Soviet-style communist rule. To those inside Poland, Solidarity represented "a potential *alternative* government" (Barker, pp. 18).

Indeed, Solidarity also called for increased rights of the Church. The labor union recognized the importance of religion and the significance of a fellow Pole guiding the

world's Catholics for the first time in history. On January 15, 1981, representatives from Solidarity – including Wałęsa – met with the Pope at the Vatican. While the visit only received minor media coverage in the United States, it represented the Pope's backing of Solidarity, and established his support of the revolutionary movement toward Polish freedom.

Things soon grew more difficult for Solidarity, however, as Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski, with the backing of the Soviet Union, replaced Kania as leader of Poland. On December 13, 1981, Jaruzelski established martial law throughout the nation in response to signs of a Soviet invasion designed to destroy the Solidarity movement. Jaruzelski authored the arrest of thousands of workers and political activists, creating havoc throughout the nation. Labor strikes were officially banned, and any form of protest was quickly – and usually violently – disrupted. The new ruler's government was “prepared to smash the workers' movement [with brute military force] the moment it got the chance” (Barker, pp. 82). *Time Magazine* noted that “what had begun as Poland's year of liberty ended dramatically in violence, bloodshed and repression” (Sancton, pp. 1).

Though bruised and beaten, the Solidarity movement refused to cease. Solidarity was instead forced underground, where the organization became a revolutionary movement battling government control in secret.

An American in Europe

When Reagan returned to Washington after his trip to Europe on June 21, 1982, he was greeted at the Andrews Air Force Base by more than 15,000 supporters. In the ten days since his meeting with Pope John Paul II, the President had traveled almost 11,000

miles to meet with various heads of state, including the leaders of the 15 other NATO countries and Queen Elizabeth II. His conclusion from the trip, he told the crowd, was that “America has a lot of friends” in the fight against communism (Church, pp. 1).

With Cold War tensions still casting an ominous shadow over global politics, Reagan tried to concentrate on the positive role of American diplomacy throughout his European stay. He told crowds in West Germany that “you are not alone.... Our adversaries would be foolishly mistaken should they gamble that Americans would abandon their alliance responsibilities, no matter how severe the test” (Church, pp. 5). He continued to remind Europeans and others throughout the international community that America was committed to standing with the democratic movement, and against the Soviet Union.

When visiting West Berlin, Reagan was walking through a crowd of military soldiers when a little girl slipped past security and thrust a bouquet of flowers into his left hand. As *Time Magazine* reporter George J. Church noted, “quite unintentionally, the incident symbolized the image [Reagan] was trying to convey to Europe: military determination on the one hand, offers of negotiation and arms control on the other” (Church, pp. 6).

The trip, however, was not entirely a positive, rosy one for the President. Thousands of protestors gathered at nearly every stop along the way, with one demonstration in West Berlin escalating to such violence that 200 rioters were injured and 271 people arrested, while portions of the city burned to the ground.

Even some in the United States criticized the trip as insincere. According to Russell Baker of the *New York Times*, the European tour “was to be an exercise in media

manipulation. By presenting a commanding figure on the TV screen back home, [Reagan] would recover some of the popularity he had lost with the failure of his economic policies. It would be a triumph of shadow over substance” (Baker, para. 5). Indeed, Reagan’s trip included a schedule booked with press conferences and carefully-crafted speeches. With access to an international audience, the President had the opportunity to catapult his image as a prominent and strong world leader.

This, however, did not seem to occur. The President was overshadowed by the news of Israel’s invasion of Lebanon, and was criticized for his ignorance of a US voting debacle in the United Nations regarding British forces in the Falklands. While Reagan was visiting Britain, the chief delegate to the UN admitted that he and the Secretary of State “don’t speak to each other on the telephone” (Baker, para. 10). Furthermore, Secretary of State Alexander Haig announced “that he doesn't interrupt the President's sleep to discuss sensitive votes involving his British allies” (Baker, para. 11). These comments proved to generate controversy throughout Western Europe, as it promoted the image of Reagan as a distant, uninvolved politician in regards to the affairs of his international allies. (Of course, the nap during the meeting with the Pope was not helpful either.)

With televised conferences and strategic photo-opportunities, many viewers felt they were experiencing a façade of staged politics. Questions of the intentions and results of Reagan’s trip were rampant. Britain, as explained, provided a particular hotbed of criticism. US officials claimed to have “a wonderful time” meeting with Queen Elizabeth, yet the British audience widely understood their royal leader to appear “distinctly displeased... [she] often looked tight-lipped and unsmiling” (Church, pp. 3).

The rest of the trip was not without critique, either. Michael D. Robinson, an associate professor of politics at Catholic University at the time, claimed that “trips like this one lack real substance, and all Mr. Reagan can count on from a sated public is ‘an ephemeral boomlet’” (Clymer, para. 15). Even conservative politicians abroad blasted Reagan; *The Financial Times*, itself a right-leaning publication, quoted a British “Cabinet member as saying that the greeting for Mr. Reagan this week would be the coolest accorded any President since the Suez crisis of 1956” (Weisman, “Pope, Italians...”, para. 14).

Despite criticism within the US and abroad, Reagan’s meeting with the Pope remained a major highlight of his Grand European Tour. Officials declared that the President was “happy about meeting the Pope, with whom he feels kinship, not least because of the common experience of having been shot in assassination attempts last year” (Weisman, “Pope, Italians...”, para. 20). Regarding their survival of attacks – only six weeks apart – the President supposedly told the Pope “Look how the evil forces were put in our way and how Providence intervened” (qtd. in Bernstein, pp. 2).

This self-proclaimed miraculous fact of survival prompted the two men to agree that they had been saved for a divine and distinct objective – to promote democracy and battle communism throughout the globe. Reagan confidently declared that his Administration shared “the same goals of peace, freedom and humanity along political and economic lines that the church pursues in its spiritual role” (qtd. in Weisman, “Pope, Italians...”, para. 21). National Security Advisor William Clark, himself a devout Roman Catholic, claimed that the meeting solidified “a unity of spiritual view and a unity of vision on the Soviet empire: that right or correctness would ultimately prevail in the

divine plan” (qtd. in Bernstein, pp. 2). It was a faith that would characterize the relationship between Reagan and Pope John Paul II for the remainder of the President’s years in office.

A Return and a Holy Proclamation

By the time Pope John Paul II announced his plans to visit Poland a second time in 1983, the mood in his native land had returned to one of somber desperation. The relatively optimistic era of Gierek had experienced an inevitable downfall, and his rule was replaced briefly by Stanisław Kania before Wojciech Jaruzelski took power, installing martial law at the end of 1981. Though official military rule had been suspended on January 1, 1983, it still presented strong restrictions on the daily life of Poles. He would be only one of two world leaders to visit Poland while the nation was held under martial law. (The other ruler was Muammar Khadafy of Libya).

On June 16, John Paul II arrived in Poland where a “government wanted to prove to the world that the state of martial law, which was still in effect, had become accepted as normal and had stabilized a European nation of some thirty-seven million inhabitants” (Walesa, pp. 116). His visit, the government estimated, would downplay the role of Solidarity and display an image – albeit an unrealistic one – of a controlled Poland of peace and prosperity.

The government, of course, was wrong, and completely underestimated John Paul’s amazing ability to reach his people and motivate them to work for human rights and peace. The pope’s first statement upon his arrival declared his prayers in the name of Christ for those suffering against repression, a proclamation that made the government

officials standing next to him visibly nervous and uncomfortable. A few days later, he told a crowd numbering in the millions:

“I am a son of this nation and that is why I feel proudly all its noble aspirations, its desire to live in truth, liberty, justice, and social solidarity, its desire to live its own life. Indeed, after a thousand years of history, this nation has its own life, culture, social traditions, spiritual identity. Virgin of Jasna Gora, I want to place under your protection all that has been produced in these difficult years since August 1980, all those truths, principles, values, and attitudes” (qtd. in Walesa, pp. 116 – 117).

The message was clear: Pope John Paul II was behind Solidarity. God and the Catholic Church would not be removed from Poland.

Poland Through the Eyes of a Superpower

During the mid-twentieth century, a Mexican statesman famously referred to Poland as a tragic nation, as it was “so far from God [and] so near Russia and Germany” (qtd. in Taras, pp. 79). Throughout the Cold War, this stigma continued to hold. By staring into the face of communist rule and religious restraint, the Poles were more willing to express their loyalty to the Church, as it became a strong and influential option against totalitarian rule.

By geographically sitting next to two of the most important nations with regard to US foreign policy – Germany and the Soviet Union – Poland also took on a special role during the Reagan Administration. Poland never catapulted to hold primary American political concern, yet the nation was considered a symbol of hope to further US interest and battle the Soviet bloc.

The Reagan Administration policy toward countries such as Poland stemmed from the philosophy that the role of communism, and the influence from the Soviet Union, was

what hindered economic stability and democratic practice in the world's poorest nations. Through Reagan's time in office, the US "sought to reverse Soviet gains in the underdeveloped regions, by supporting anticommunist forces struggling against Marxist regimes overtly, or, where that was not possible, covertly" (Powaski, pp. 234). Along with Third World nations throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America, Poland fell into this branch of the Reagan Doctrine as a country demanding the attention of the US for its potential strength in battling communist rule.

While the Pope was able and willing to address his home nation directly as a Pole, President Reagan's discourse on the satellite nation was through the lens of a developed nation. He was the ruler of a diplomatic superpower and dealt with the Soviet bloc as such, attempting to convince other First World allies that taking down communist rule in Eastern Europe and beyond was of great interest and concern.

In a mirrored version of the famous domino theory from earlier Cold War days, the Reagan Administration advocated that if one communist nation were to fall to democracy, others throughout the Soviet bloc would follow. This hope led to the continued American support of nations such as Poland. The assistance, however, differed from that of the Catholic Church. As the US and the Vatican continued to discuss Cold War politics, it would become clear how different the roles of President Reagan and Pope John Paul II would develop.

An Alliance Unraveled

It was the Pope's talent and ability to connect directly to the Polish people that helped him generate such excitement throughout his native land. John Paul II, known for

his charisma and enthusiasm while in the public eye, was undoubtedly the most powerful symbol of hope that was able to motivate the Poles to action as no other political figure could.

A survey of the Polish people taken shortly after Solidarity was forced underground in 1981 displayed how profound a role the pope played in Cold War politics. As an institution, 94 percent of the Polish population declared their trust in the Catholic Church (Kolankieicz, pp. 155). In comparison, the Polish government had only won the trust of 69 percent of the masses. Even Solidarity, with a ranking of 91 percent, was placed behind the Catholic Church in how trustworthy and beneficial they were perceived.

Clearly, Pope John Paul II had enormous influence over the politics of the people during the Cold War. This was evident early on in his pontificate; by the time of his first visit to Poland in 1979, “the balance of power had shifted away from the Soviet sphere of influence toward the Vatican” (Weeks). He would stand with his native people in the face of an oppressive regime. The Poles recognized this, and directly supported the pope as a powerful and significant political leader throughout the revolution.

As noted, the Poles associated closely with the Catholic Church as it was a clear signal of rebellion against the traditionally-Orthodox Russians. Just as the Irish align so strongly with the Catholic Church as a response to the Anglican rule of Great Britain, many throughout the Polish population concluded that the Catholic Church – and the Pope himself – would provide the tools to send a clear message to the world that Eastern Europe was dissatisfied with Soviet-style communist rule.

Thus, with each visit to his native land, the pope was welcomed by unimaginably massive crowds of people, waiting for hours on end to catch a simple glimpse of the man. He was a hero, a martyr, and a true leader of the general population under a repressive regime. His various pilgrimages contrasted sharply with the European tour efforts of President Reagan. While Reagan remained a controversial figure in Europe, advocating for nuclear arms build-up, an aggressive homeland defense plan, and other militaristic means for peace, Pope John Paul II consistently practiced the awesome ability of provoking change through words and faith. He never failed to generate an environment of excitement wherever he traveled.

John Paul's method of stimulating these crowds helped him immensely in his goal to promote the Church and free government throughout the Soviet bloc. Reagan, in comparison, seemed distant and uninspiring to many audiences outside of America. The pope was the true political leader whom Poles were able to trust and stand behind in hopes of a better life. The Catholic Church, in effect, became the catalyst toward a free Poland.

Indeed, the Vatican helped the Solidarity movement in reaching the goal of a free Poland without the advice or support of the United States. Solidarity leaders knew they had support from both governing bodies, but were unsure of how far the political alliance between the two was developing. According to Wojciech Adamiecki, a Solidarity organizer, the Vatican's role with the movement was "half open, half secret. Open as far as humanitarian aid – food, money, medicine, doctors' consultations held in churches, for instance – and secret as far as supporting political activities: distributing printing machines of all kinds, giving us a place for underground meetings, organizing special

demonstrations” (Bernstein, pp. 2). Poland’s first fax machine, given directly to the Solidarity movement, was made possible through Vatican delivery. The Holy See had plenty of covert operations of its own in Poland, many of which the United States was completely unaware.

The United States’ efforts to aid Poland were intimately tied to the Reagan Doctrine, envisioning it as a Third World nation whose pro-democracy efforts could help topple Soviet power. The US incorporated the importance of John Paul into its own policies by recognizing the important influence the pope had over the nation. The Reagan Administration established a formal diplomatic relationship, and Cabinet members were sure to visit the Vatican on nearly every visit to Europe. American officials met with the Pope to share information regarding the status of the Soviet Union and Poland, which never failed to interest the Holy Father.

While military arms build-up continued at home, Washington pledged to aid Poland through delivering financial aid and an overall encouragement of reform movements throughout Eastern Europe. The Reagan Administration pledged to place economic sanctions on any nation not representing American interests or infringing on human rights, and did so to Poland while the nation was under martial law. The US also looked to increase the use of radio transmissions in the Soviet bloc to promote the message of democracy, believing that if nations under Soviet influence were to fall, others would follow. These acts, however, were designed outside of the Washington-Vatican relationship. Though both shared the goal to reach the Polish people in support of anti-communist movements, the two political entities were doing so with different philosophies and without conversation over each other’s strategic moves.

While the US efforts with regard to Poland were generally peaceful, the overall Cold War mentality of the Reagan Administration clashed with the Catholic philosophy. In 1983, 247 bishops of the United States gathered to vote on the final text of a pastoral letter on war and peace, eventually declaring that nuclear war at any level could not be morally justified. These criticisms boldly declared US foreign policy as immoral (at least in part), and further emphasized the Vatican's role in Poland as one of non-violent, inspirational change.

Even Pope John Paul II publicly disapproved of parts of Reagan's Cold War philosophy, as he was unafraid to criticize the United States for its capitalist greed and call for increased nuclear weaponry. John Paul's outspoken role in condemning the US for nuclear armament hindered the two governing bodies from intimately planning action in overthrowing communist regimes. The alliance became most strained in late 1981, when John Paul II delivered a letter to both Reagan and Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev that "implicitly blamed both the U.S. and the Soviets for moving the world toward Armageddon" through their efforts in the nuclear arms race (Riebling, para. 10).

Despite calls for disarmament from the Vatican that continued throughout his administration's reign, President Reagan understood that maintaining superior nuclear power would intimidate enemies and prove the strengths of the free world. John Paul's public critiques of nuclear armament would fall on the deaf ears of policy makers, instead insuring that the United States and the Holy See would never prepare policy as similar political powers. American officials have claimed that "the public stances of the Vatican did little to influence either US or Soviet policy.... [The two superpowers] already had their own agendas and timetables" (Bono, para. 21 – 22). The clash over nuclear armory

remained the most profound and ruling difference in the United States' relationship with the Holy See throughout the Cold War.

The non-violent means of revolution supported by John Paul II continued to clash with the nuclear philosophy of Reagan with specific regard to Poland. The Pope's message of revolution through Christ held stronger resonance with his native people than the political superpower jargon of the American president. With the bordering Soviet Union never lifting its finger from the pulse of Polish politics, the Holy Father became a divine voice of revolution that the Poles continued to support.

John Paul's intimate connection to his native land proved most politically beneficial during his first visit as pope in 1979. As noted earlier, it was this very pilgrimage that provoked a "revolution of conscience [that] made possible the nonviolent political Revolution of 1989 — which in turn led to the Soviet crack-up in 1991" (Weigel, para. 6). Even to the later surprise of the pope himself, this trip would plant the seeds of change and long be credited for starting the movement toward freedom.

Thus, before Ronald Reagan was even elected as President of the United States, Pope John Paul II had effectively stirred Poland toward a rebellion that led to the eventual break-up of communism throughout Eastern Europe, and, ultimately, to the fall of the Soviet Union itself. This suggests that the official Washington-Vatican alliance, beginning in 1984 with the foundation of the US Embassy to the Holy See, was never a major catalyst toward democratic reform throughout the Soviet bloc. Indeed, John Paul's motivational charisma and personal connection to Poland are more responsible for democratic reform than the political alliance between superpower and Holy state.

With a similar abhorrence for communist rule, emphasized by differences in Polish influence and nuclear policy, the United States and the Vatican could share “information about the Cold War but did not engage in coordinated actions to topple to Soviet bloc” (Bono, para. 1). Reagan and John Paul would exchange letters reiterating their support for one another through the Cold War years, but, despite public speculation, never went so far as to devise an aggressive plan toward toppling communism. By the time the conflict ended and the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, it was clear that “without formal coordination, even without very much discussion between the principals, Reagan and John Paul pursued, with astonishing success, parallel courses toward the same end: the defeat of Communism and the restoration of east-central Europe to freedom” (Weigel, para. 6).

Reevaluating the Past, Looking to the Future

In 1987, John Paul visited Poland once more, greeting crowds numbering in the millions with prayer and praise for Solidarity, a similar theme from each of his previous trips to his homeland. Four months previous, the Polish government had agreed to open dialogue with the Catholic Church. Reagan, almost immediately after, lifted US sanctions on the nation. Solidarity was winning the fight against the Soviet-style communism that had long ruled Eastern Europe.

The following year, Soviet Union Leader Mikhail Gorbachev visited Warsaw, a pilgrimage that symbolized the inability of the Soviet Union to manipulate Poland any longer. On April 5, 1989, the Soviet Union and Poland legalized Solidarity; free parliamentary elections would take place in June. In December 1990, Lech Walesa

became President of Poland. One year later, the Soviet Union collapsed, signaling the end of the Cold War era.

When Pope John Paul II passed away on April 2, 2005, more than one billion people throughout the globe mourned the loss of one the world's most prominent and influential leaders. US President George W. Bush, who had one year earlier awarded John Paul with the Medal of Freedom – America's highest civilian honor – for his role in defeating Soviet-style communism, declared that the world “will always remember the humble, wise and fearless priest who became one of history's great moral leaders” (qtd. in Amanpour, para. 20). Walesa reiterated the importance of the Pope's political role, claiming that “[without him] there would be no end of communism or at least [it would have happened] much later, and the end would have been bloody” (qtd. in Amanpour, para. 25). Gorbachev, who had claimed in 1992 that the fall of international communism would have been impossible without the work of the Pope, told grievors that John Paul's “devotion to his followers is a remarkable example to all of us” (qtd. in Chilcote, para. 1).

Though the world mourned John Paul's death, they also celebrated his tremendous and unequalled role in international politics. History, it seemed, would certainly judge him as a charismatic and influential man who helped motivate change on a global scale. John Paul's death, coupled with the passing of former President Reagan one year previous, brought the relationship between the two men back to headlines almost fifteen years after the fall of the Soviet Union and Eastern European communist rule.

However, for the first time in many years there seemed to be an inconsistency regarding how the alliance helped end the Cold War. While some authors celebrated a

holy alliance, others paid tribute to the Pope and the President as two men “on ‘parallel tracks’ in the Cold War”, standing up, albeit separately, for the freedom of all people throughout the globe (Bono, para. 7). With the revealing of previously classified documents and information, the world public was finally able to reach into a political relationship that, up until that point, was the subject of mere speculation.

The political alliance between the United States and the Holy See remains a mysterious and intriguing one to this day. It is a relationship that most Americans do not hear about in their everyday news. The Church has famously criticized the American move toward war with Iraq, but, in general, has otherwise avoided headlines with regards to Washington-Vatican diplomacy since the turn of the century. This, of course, does not mean that relations between America and the Holy See are stagnant or unimportant; it simply means that we must search for the truths of the relationship and maintain faith that the alliance is working for the good of all people worldwide. As we move forward through time, we will continue to learn more about the influence of this important partnership between democratic nation and holy state. Through actively reinterpreting American and Vatican relations from the past, we can work and pray for the success of our aligned goals of peace and human equality in the present, helping to establish a world of freedom for all to enjoy in the future.

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