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# Pope John Paul II's Role in the Collapse of Poland's Communist Regime: Examining a Religious Leader's Impact on International Relations

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# Pope John Paul II's Role in the Collapse of Poland's Communist Regime: Examining a Religious Leader's Impact on International Relations

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## Abstract

The international relations field knows Pope John Paul II for his temporal leadership in the Roman Catholic Church, but less is known about his pivotal role in the rise of Poland's independent trade movement, Solidarity, and the collapse of that nation's Communist government. This study analyzes current scholarship in order to establish the importance that an individual actor can have within political science, and in doing so, outlines the criteria for effective leadership. Major texts include Max Weber's seminal *Economy and Society*, James MacGregor Burns' *Leadership*, which explores the concept of "transforming leadership," Fred Greenstein's "The Impact of Personality on Politics: An Attempt to Clear Away Underbrush," and Ann Ruth Willner's *The Spellbinders: Charismatic Political Leadership*. After examining how John Paul II met this leadership criteria, attention turns to his three papal visits to Poland, where his efforts created a hospitable environment in an attempt to oppose the Communist authorities, where Poles felt able to express their grievances, and where change was possible. Further evidence of the Pope's significant role comes from analyzing the cooperative relationship between the Vatican and the United States under President Ronald Reagan. To measure the U.S.S.R.'s response to the Pope's efforts, this study turns to Politburo documents, interviews with major authors and evidence that suggests Soviet orchestration was behind the 1981 attempted assassination of John Paul II in Rome. This study ultimately finds that Pope John Paul II's impact was more than religious, that it was political and that its lasting repercussions included the weakening of the global Soviet empire. The findings provide a basis for further studying the international role of religious figures rather than merely the role of nation-states.

## Introduction

This thesis examines the claim that Pope John Paul II, the temporal head of the Roman Catholic Church, played a pivotal role in destabilizing the Soviet Union's political dominance over Eastern Europe from 1979-1989. To measure the Pope's impact, this thesis uses as a case study the Soviet-backed regime that was established in his native country of Poland. The rise of Poland's independent labor movement Solidarity (*Solidarność*) is cited throughout literature as a catalytic event in the fall of the Soviet Union. The role of John Paul II, however, whom Polish and Soviet leaders called a significant player in Poland's anti-communist movement, lacks scholarly analysis through the lens of international relations. This void produces a skewed image

of Soviet communism's collapse, a major twentieth-century event, and this thesis aims to present a more holistic image.

In this thesis, I argue that John Paul II played an essential role in opposing Soviet power in Poland and thus across the globe. To justify this claim, I will first argue that an individual religious figure is capable of uniquely influencing international relations. Since the study of international relations often emphasizes the interactions between nation-states, it is necessary in my case to distinguish how a leader distinctly yields power within the nation-state he or she represents. In his anti-communist efforts, the Pope exercised two interrelated identities; spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic Church and temporal leader of the Vatican. His victorious intervention in Poland suggests that the spiritual and political spheres resist separation. For this reason, establishing the importance of so-called charismatic or "transforming" leadership is necessary before asserting that a single figure can make a dent upon the international status quo (Burns 426; Weber 1: 215). Once this point is made, I will explore how the Pope's leadership fulfills the theoretical criteria. An examination of the Pope's specific efforts will follow, with particular focus upon his partnership with the United States and Solidarity, alliances that were made in an effort to oppose the communist regime, as well as instances when he directly intervened in Polish affairs: these events include disputes with the communist authorities when he was a priest and later archbishop of Krakow, and his three papal visits. This intervention produced an active rather than dismissive Soviet response, which plausibly includes the failed assassination attempt on John Paul II in 1981.

This thesis will consider alternative explanations for communism's demise. Certain economic factors existed that were beyond the Pope's influence, including the U.S.S.R.'s failed

military campaign in Afghanistan, the consequences, both intended and unintended, of General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* reforms, and economic pressure that was related to military competition with the United States. All things considered, Pope John Paul II played a major but not singular role in communism's global collapse. This thesis agrees with the Pope's own words: "The tree was already rotten. I just gave it a good shake and the rotten apples fell" (Bernstein, *His Holiness* 356). Pope John Paul II's dynamic personality and anti-communist efforts impacted global events, revealing historical precedence for a religious leader who modifies international affairs.

## **Methodology**

Poland is an appropriate case study because it effectively answers the central question: Did John Paul II's efforts to weaken global communism produce significant change? The Pope's actions were grounded in his Polish identity. He was born in Poland during a brief period of independence, where he later performed in underground plays and studied seminary during the Nazi occupation, and ultimately countered Soviet control over the course of three decades. *The Washington Post's* Roberto Suro highlights John Paul II's strong connection to his homeland and his personal experience with the foreign occupiers who controlled it. According to Suro, Karol Wojtyla (he took the name "John Paul II" upon being elected pope in October 1979) was known to Poland as "the skier, the actor, the playwright, the poet, the man who had lived through World War II, the man who knew communism" (qtd. in "John Paul II: The Millennial Pope). Without a life-long connection with Poland, John Paul II would have lacked a personal history with the U.S.S.R. He may not have fought communism at all. It was in Poland that the Pope concentrated

his opposition to Soviet domination, visiting the country three times prior to the April 1989 establishment of semi-free elections; in 1979, 1983, and 1987. His personal ties to the nation ingratiated him with its people. Three million Poles, one-tenth of the nation's population, greeted him upon his first arrival to Poland as Pope, in June 1979 (Pleshakov 86). This special relationship existed between John Paul II and no other country. His national identity defined him from the start of his papacy, as soon as the College of Cardinals voted him the first non-Italian Pope elected since Adrian VI in 1522.

The Pope's impact upon the Communist Party's global empire reverberated outward from Poland. Choosing one of those other nations as the case study would have examined the effect of the Pope's influence rather than the source. Czechoslovakia was an attractive candidate for the case study because the Pope directly intervened in Czech affairs as well. When the Church in this neighboring country was suffering from a priest shortage, then-Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, under the permission of a Czech bishop, ordained priests for that nation (O'Sullivan 18). John Paul II also visited Czechoslovakia, but in April 1990. This date was prior to the U.S.S.R.'s collapse but after the demise of Czechoslovakia's Soviet-supported government in November 1989. Since by this time the U.S.S.R. was breaking apart, and the Czechs had already overthrown the Communist Party's influence, Czechoslovakia would be an ineffective case study. Lithuania was another candidate for this study, but its suitability was invalidated by this study's time horizon and Lithuania's tendency to be influenced by rather than influencing events in neighboring states. Bernstein and Politi note that in Lithuania, which suffered more brutal media regulation than its southern neighbor, citizens near the Polish border received less censored coverage of John Paul II's 1979 papal visit (qtd. in Brown 426-427). Furthermore, the Pope also visited Lithuania, but

as in Czechoslovakia, the visit was too late to influence the U.S.S.R., whose demise occurred two years prior.

The time period for this thesis extends from October 16, 1979 to April 5, 1989. The first date marks Karol Wojtyla's election to the papacy. On the latter date, Poland's Communist Party signed an agreement with Solidarity that legitimized the labor movement as a political party. This agreement set the stage for the June 1989 elections, which propelled Solidarity into power and ended Poland's communist era. I considered extending the time horizon to the Soviet Union's official dissolution in December 1991. Doing so would have altered the intention of this thesis, however, which is to examine papal opposition to Poland's communist regime and the subsequent repercussions of this opposition upon the broader Soviet Union. This thesis will not examine every instance of papal opposition to the U.S.S.R. in Poland during and after the period of communist rule. There will be references to earlier incidents, however, beginning at the time of the priestly ordination of the future John Paul II, Karol Wojtyla, in 1946, and continuing throughout Wojtyla's service as archbishop of Krakow. During this period, Wojtyla confronted the communist regime without the top-level leadership that the papacy provided. One incident to be examined is Wojtyla's successful attempt in the early 1970s to build a church at Nowa Huta, a Polish town that was constructed to be a communal utopia where places of worship were banned. There are surviving records of Soviet opinions about the future pope, and these are useful in order to trace the development of his antagonistic relationship with the regime. Events such as these occur outside the time horizon, but they provide necessary secondary evidence for painting a more complete portrait of John Paul II's human character.

Before discussing the Pope's influence within the context of this study, this thesis will show that the study of an institutional leader, whether political or religious, is a worthwhile endeavor in the international relations field. This analysis must occur before the anti-communist role of Pope John Paul II, a non-structural factor, is discussed. In the likelihood that international relations theorists emphasize structural factors, it is necessary to defend the assumption that an individual leader can influence international relations. Only when this point is made can the thesis move forward. Alternative structural factors are accounted for in the latter portion of this thesis. Since much scholarly analysis covers these structural factors, it would be redundant to delve deeply into them. Their inclusion is not to regurgitate old arguments, but to avoid the false notion that John Paul II single-handedly brought down the Soviet menace. Including these supplemental factors connects this thesis with the majority of scholarly writing, which tends towards a preoccupation with structural analysis. The argument that the Pope's involvement alone explains the U.S.S.R.'s collapse is as erroneous as the argument that structural factors alone mattered, and this thesis intends to avoid both pitfalls.

My research for this study initially embraced a mere historical perspective, seeking to explain a past event with a new twist. Only when my research was underway did I recognize the theoretical implications of my findings. If Pope John Paul II played an essential role in the collapse of communism, perhaps another religious leader exerted power elsewhere, with measurable effects, in the modern day. I wondered what existing scholarship said about an individual actor's importance to world events. It was then that I expanded the scope of my research to include leadership itself, and the power of one man or woman to inspire change. John Lewis Gaddis, a noted Cold War scholar and Yale University Professor, sparked my interest



when he trumpeted John Paul II as a major figure in communism's demise. This was surprising because nowhere in my academic career, from high school through college, did the leader of the Roman Catholic Church come up in a discussion about the Soviet Union. Gaddis' powerful assertions assumed widespread acceptance of the Pope's role within the academic community. I personally knew this was not the case. At this point I realized that a hole existed within Cold War scholarship. This was not a hole that could be filled with a simple insertion of John Paul II into the debate. On the contrary, I needed to argue for the inclusion of non-structural factors, primarily the involvement of human actors, in a discussion about the Cold War. After the discovery, the next point of business became organizing my findings. As previously discussed, I have included a defense of individual leadership before the main argument about the Pope. In doing so, I hope to shed more light on the U.S.S.R.'s final years while substantiating the weak assertions that even a celebrated humanities scholar such as Gaddis made.

To clarify, "communism" refers to the ideology advocated in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and its Eastern European satellite states. Any reference in this study to the Communist Party means the political organ that institutionalized communist ideology within the U.S.S.R. rather than in the People's Republic of China. The demise of communist influence mirrors the collapse of the U.S.S.R., its global champion. Concerning the title of the Roman pontiff, the word "pope" is also used. When this text mentions "the Pope" it means specifically Pope John Paul II. Lastly, "the Church" refers specifically to the Roman Catholic Church.

## Literature Review

### I. Theoretical Literature

The sources are divided into two categories, theoretical literature that focuses on individual actors' role within international relations and empirical literature that analyzes the relationship between Poland, the Pope, and the Soviet Union. Major works within the first category include James MacGregor Burns' *Leadership*, Fred Greenstein's "The Impact of Personality on Politics: An Attempt to Clear Away Underbrush," published in *The American Political Science Review*, Max Weber's *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* and Ann Ruth Willner's *The Spellbinders: Charismatic Political Leadership*. This literature agrees that individual actors may influence the global status quo, but limits their influence to varying degrees that are dependent upon suitable circumstances. Greenstein calls this "the question of action dispensability," which asks "what are the circumstances under which the actions of single individuals are likely to have a greater or lesser effect on the course of events" (633). Even the most captivating leaders are subject to the conditions in which they operate. In "The Impact of Personality on Politics: An Attempt to Clear Away Underbrush," Greenstein specifies what factors prompt a leader to have greater influence upon political circumstances and which factors impede such influence. Individual actors that are caught within the middle ranks of a bureaucratic system, for instance, will be less likely to exude influence upon the entire system than an individual who is located at the top of the command chain. Greenstein calls this factor "the location of the actor in [his or her] environment" and includes along with it "the actor's peculiar strengths and weaknesses" (634). Therefore, a leader's ability

to influence the status quo is not only dependent upon whether the conditions allow him or her to incite change, but also on the leader's personal skills or lack thereof.

Elsewhere in the literature, the particular strengths and weaknesses that help or hinder a leader's ability are named. In *The Spellbinders: Charismatic Political Leadership*, Ann Ruth Willner argues that strong leaders have excellent rhetorical skills. She writes that an influential orator will employ "figurative language," "cultural symbols [that] ... elicit the emotions" and "devices related to sound, such as rhythm, repetition, alliteration, and balance" (152). Willner also states that influential leaders produce a widespread belief that they possess exceptional qualities and share a strong connection with the people they rule or represent. Followers believe that the charismatic leader possesses more than exceptional goodness. "In the charismatic relationship, followers believe their leader to have superhuman qualities or to possess to an extraordinary degree the qualities highly esteemed in their culture" (Willner 6). Powerful leaders have followers who believe that the former possess more than simply above-average talent.

James MacGregor Burns sees more practical requirements for an influential leader. True leadership must tap into shared needs between the ruler and the ruled or, in a democratic society, between the president and the citizenry. Burns calls this concept "moral leadership," which is such that "leaders and led have a relationship not only of power but of mutual needs, aspirations and values" and "that leaders take responsibility for their commitments" (4). Successful leaders, those who produce real change, understand where their people come from. These leaders share a cultural identity and will use this identity to rally the masses. Leaders will promise the masses that their needs will be fulfilled, that their aspirations will be met, and that their values will be protected. Such promises, however, are a double-edged sword. Leaders must follow through or

risk losing their support. Yet this is not the form of leadership that requires the most from the person on top. This distinction belongs to “transforming leadership,” which is “leadership that occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality” (Burns 20). This leadership produces the most change, if utilized correctly, because it allows for the entire society to progress. For this to occur, the leader must understand the society’s basic needs and wishes, change conditions so they are met, and through interaction make the society better in the most moral sense of the word.

A discussion of political leadership would be incomplete without referencing charismatic leadership, a term coined by sociologist Max Weber in *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Cited by both Burns and Willner, Weber describes his concept as that form of “personal authority” which “surrender[s] to the extraordinary, the belief in *charisma*, i.e., actual revelation or grace resting in such a person as a savior, a prophet, or a hero” (3: 954). To Willner, the source of the charismatic qualities is not as important as the subjects that recognize such qualities and respond with obedience. In practice, charismatic leadership allows rulers to construct a cult of personality around themselves in order to demand compliance from their subjects without resorting to coercion.

One set of circumstances provides a fertile breeding ground for charismatic leaders to work their magic – crisis. During a crisis, the status quo is upset and subjects want stability. A charismatic individual is a prime candidate for bringing about stability. Internal violence especially, if orchestrated by the current regime, creates anxiety and resentment, both of which are suitable conditions for an opposition-minded charismatic leader to arise. As Willner writes,

“Apart from the fact that internal violence and terrorism can hinder normal life and livelihood, even violence and terror directed at specific targets tend to take their toll of others, heightening anxiety and resentment” (46). Even when the government is rallied around a designated, limited enemy, the vast majority may experience disillusionment. The crisis is a truly tumultuous situation, during which people demand change towards peace. But a violent crisis is not enough for charismatic leaders to swoop in and begin reforms. Burns’s emphasis upon fulfilling social needs cannot be forgotten. Weber describes the charismatic leader’s burden: “The charismatic hero derives his authority not from an established order and enactments ... [h]e gains and retains it solely by proving his powers in practice” (3: 1114). Charismatic leaders will fail unless they fill society’s wants, which during a crisis is to bring peace. Therefore, in Poland, Soviet oppression would not suffice for a charismatic leader to gain long-term adherence. Polish society would expect measurable results, sooner rather than later.

Charismatic and transforming leadership are relevant to the discussion of John Paul II because it was these forms of leadership that the Pope employed within Poland. Josef Stalin once expressed his contempt for the Church, asking, “How many divisions does the Pope have?” (“John Paul II: The Millennial Pope). Besides the Swiss Guard, which provides special protection for the Pope, there are no divisions. John Paul II, therefore, was limited to using soft power to advance change. Establishing his ability to garner support through charismatic leadership is essential to understanding how the Pope used soft power, specifically through shaming and blaming, to fuel Poles’ anti-communist activism. If an average Pole spoke to General Wojciech Jaruzelski, the sixth First Secretary of the Polish United Worker’s Party or to Lech Walesa, Solidarity’s leader and future Polish president, it would mean little. The theory of

charismatic political leadership suggests, however, that a person in the right position, with the right perceived qualities and in the proper circumstances may bring about change.

## II. Empirical Literature

While the theoretical literature establishes what attributes successful leaders must have, the empirical literature studies whether the Pope's exercise of leadership had consequences within Poland and, in turn, on the Communist Party globally. Principal sources include Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi's *His Holiness*, Archie Brown's *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, John Lewis Gaddis' *The Cold War: A New History*, John O'Sullivan's *The President, the Pope and the Prime Minister*, George Weigel's two biographies of the late pontiff, entitled *The End and the Beginning: Pope John Paul II – The Victory of Freedom, the Last Years, the Legacy* and *Witness to Hope*, and PBS's documentary *John Paul II: The Millennial Pope*. Generally speaking, the sources agree that the Pope's intervention was an essential factor in ending the Communist Party's Polish rule and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The specific point of disagreement lies in ascribing credit to the Roman pontiff rather than to other factors. Gaddis identifies the 1979 papal visit as the trigger that led to communism's collapse worldwide. In *The Cold War: A New History*, Gaddis writes that "when John Paul II kissed the ground at the Warsaw airport on June 2, 1979, he began the process by which communism in Poland – and ultimately everywhere – would come to an end" (193). Bernstein provides vast information on the Soviet, Solidarity and Polish-Communist perspectives towards John Paul II. KGB leader Yuri Andropov accused the Vatican of "creating a new type of confrontation with the Communist Party" by abandoning its previous policy that was aimed towards reconciliation with Soviet

influence in Eastern Europe (Bernstein, *His Holiness* 388). Such comments suggest that John Paul II's Vatican played a large role in weakening communism's global strength. Archie Brown is of the opposite persuasion, arguing that Solidarity, though bolstered by papal activities within Poland, had a limited international impact. In *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, Brown writes that "there was ... no causal link between the political achievements of Solidarity at the beginning of the 1980s and the fall of communism in Eastern Europe at the end of the decade" (436-437). Other sources, to be discussed shortly, take a moderate approach that ascribes praise to the Pope without suggesting that he was the magic bullet that killed the Soviet Union.

The lack of peer-reviewed journals that cover the Pope's anti-communist role is frustrating, though the scarcity is amended by George Weigel's two authoritative biographies of Pope John Paul II, which most other sources, both religious and secular, cite. That so many varying sources point back to Weigel speaks volumes about the value of *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* and *The End and the Beginning: Pope John Paul II – The Victory of Freedom, the Last Years, the Legacy*. Furthermore, Mary Eberstadt writes a well-balanced review of *The End and the Beginning* in the Dec. 2010/Jan. 2011 edition of *Policy Review* that reiterates Weigel's dominance regarding the issue of Pope John Paul II, his political relationship with President Ronald Reagan, and communism. In his article "The President and the Pope," published in the conservative magazine *National Review*, Weigel criticizes authors who overemphasize the connection between Reagan and John Paul II, arguing that the relationship was more of support than a coequal partnership.

The sources agree that the United States supported John Paul II's anti-communist plans, but as the above tension illustrates, there are disagreements about President Ronald Reagan's

personal investment and the extent to which papal activism would have succeeded without American support. O'Sullivan includes a story that describes the president's reaction to the 1979 papal visit, during which the then California governor cried. Rather than including such emotionally appealing narratives, Weigel limits his discussion to factual evidence. Weigel cites the correspondence between the American president and the Catholic pontiff and intelligence meetings Reagan orchestrated for the Pope involving U.S. General Vernon Walters and CIA Director William Casey. In "The President and The Pope," Weigel criticizes those who argue that the two world leaders had a secret alliance. "Journalistic fantasists like Carl Bernstein notwithstanding," Weigel writes, "there was no 'holy alliance,' no conspiracy between President Reagan and Pope John Paul to bring down the Soviet empire" (23). Instead, Weigel states, the Pope's greatest victory was his first papal visit to his home country, made over a year prior to Reagan's election. Three million people greeted the Pope in Krakow as part of this unprecedented nine-day journey in June 1979, which sparked an anxious correspondence between Yuri Andropov, the Communist Party's General Secretary, and Edward Gierek, First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party, and galvanized the majority Catholic population. Reagan, in turn, held most sway by presenting an economic challenge to the Soviet Union independently of the Vatican. At the same time, the two world leaders maintained a largely letter-based communication (one dozen letters during Reagan's first year in office alone). They also met in Rome in June 1982 and June 1987 behind closed doors to discuss matters related to the Communist Party's grip over Eastern Europe. Their interaction certainly strengthened the anti-communist cause through mutual collaboration, but in *The End and the Beginning*, Weigel is



careful to emphasize each man's ability to orchestrate political achievements individually; he rejects the holy alliance that Bernstein proclaims in his 1992 article of the same name.

The sources also stir debate regarding the nature of John Paul II's political power, more correctly stated as moral power with political consequences. Weigel assigns hard power to Reagan and soft power, exercised through diplomatic shame-and-blame channels, to the Pope. This soft power was not without efficacy, the authors are sure to note, and contained real, substantial influence. O'Sullivan highlights the Pope's ability to command large swaths of the population simply because of their shared religious, cultural and ethnic heritage. O'Sullivan also writes how, from his time as a young priest to archbishop of Krakow, Pope John Paul II – then Karol Wojtyla – defied Soviet authority through his homilies and clever subterfuge, such as tricking the Polish government into constructing churches that they had originally forbidden. Constantine Pleshakov, in *There is No Freedom Without Bread!: 1989 and the Civil War That Brought Down Communism*, writes of the sheer numbers that were under John Paul II's influence. On a basic level, Pleshakov argues, Pope John Paul II was uniquely suited to dealing with the situation of communism in Poland, because his identity created a personal connection with a wounded people.

Strong evidence for the Pope's international role comes from the opinions of other world leaders and public figures. The impressions made upon renowned politicians who worked alongside (or against) John Paul II provide first-hand information about the man and his effects, whether upon political events or upon the minds of his contemporaries. Bernstein's list of interview subjects includes former U.S. national security advisers Zbigniew Brzezinski and Richard Allen, other American officials and diplomats, and Jaruzelski and Walesa. Bernstein also

includes within his text several sections of Politburo documents. Weigel refers to similar documents but only in brief citations rather than in large blocks of text. To the misfortune of current and future researchers, the Russian government has since reclassified many of these documents. Bernstein thereby does a great service by providing primary source material that would be otherwise unavailable.

Historical context is needed in order to judge the significance of certain events and particular individuals. PBS's "John Paul II: The Millennial Pope" examines John Paul II's struggles against the U.S.S.R. and Poland's historical difficulties. Originally aired as a *Frontline* special, "John Paul II: The Millennial Pope" reminds viewers of the Pope's personal history, which extended through the Holocaust and the Nazi and Soviet occupations, and particularly of his humanity and Polish heritage. Wilton Wynn, a foreign correspondent for *TIME*, recalls the Pope's emotional first night during the 1979 papal visit:

The most touching moment of that day was when [the crowds] started singing an old Polish folk song about the mountaineer who loved his mountains so much but now he's gone and he can't come back ... [T]here were almost tears in my eyes at that moment to see this man who was so Polish, so deeply rooted in his homeland and who had to give it all up for the rest of his life, to come and serve the Church in Rome. ("John Paul II: The Millennial Pope")

This passage reveals yet another element of the Pope's Polishness; that he *used* his connection to the country he loved to bring about his desired result, the collapse of the communist regime. This element connects to the previous reference to charismatic leadership, which requires leaders to understand and utilize their connection with their people in order to fulfill their needs. "John Paul II: The Millennial Pope" explains more than the Pope's ethnic heritage; it explains how he was aware of his heritage, acknowledged and presented it through charisma, how people reacted emotionally and the actions that such emotional reactions precipitated.

Whether the Pope mattered within Poland is one question, but another question is that of scope: Did the peaceful overthrow of Poland's communist regime, in which this thesis argues the Pope lent a hand, trigger the demise of the entire U.S.S.R.? The sources, as expected, vary in their conclusions. Brown asserts that there were regional effects on the Eastern Bloc countries. Brown is careful to remind readers of how one nation's act of defiance can spill over into another. The instance of Lithuanians accessing freer coverage of the first papal visit demonstrates how verbal, religious-based soft power worked well for the pontiff. As discussed, however, Brown sets boundaries in which to frame the Pope's role. Despite John Paul II's ability to inspire people across borders, Brown states that there was no connection between the Solidarity movement and the overall collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. Therefore, even if John Paul II led Solidarity in the place of Lech Walesa, for instance, his actions still would not be the defining factor in the Soviet Union's collapse.

In all, the sources conclude that John Paul II's efforts, strengthened to some degree by American assistance, quickened but did not necessitate the extinction of communism in Poland and, through a chain of events, the Soviet Union. Terrence P. Jeffrey is one of the few dissenters, arguing that the Pope's role was indispensable. Jeffrey highlights the Pope and President Reagan's abilities to bridge the gap between Christian sects and take on a demonized enemy. For Jeffrey, the combined power of American might and Catholic spirituality was an immense force against evil. In "One Moment, One Wall, One Truth," published in the conservative newspaper *Human Events*, Jeffrey places Reagan and John Paul II on interdenominational pedestals, united against the villainous Soviets. Elsewhere, the Pope's charismatic power – and the divine spirit to which it allegedly pointed – becomes evident. As Melady and Stebbins write in "US-Vatican

Relations: 25th Anniversary and a New President, “The intercession of the Holy Spirit lent vast moral support to the [Solidarity] movement and before long it had swelled to over ten million people” (59). Melady and Stebbins explicitly center John Paul II’s religious involvement in the formation of Poland’s first independent trade union while expressing the historic fact that the Pope’s visit caused Solidarity’s support to skyrocket. Nevertheless, keeping in mind the economic challenges facing the Soviet Union is necessary to create a balanced view of the Pope’s involvement. Aiming for this nuanced understanding allows researchers to consider many factors without writing off Solidarity’s success on a single one.

The literature provides mixed views about alleged Soviet involvement behind the failed May 13, 1981 assassination plot on the pontiff. O’Sullivan spends much effort explaining the details of the case, including shooter Mehmet Ali Agca’s background, the implausibility of the Pope surviving a wound that missed his central aorta by millimeters and, a subject that is most relevant to this thesis, the search for the ultimate culprit. O’Sullivan cites lengthy evidence from an Italian parliamentary commission that cleared Sergei Antonov, a suspected Bulgarian agent who allegedly hired Agca, and the photographic evidence that later placed Antonov in St. Peter’s Square at the time of the shooting. O’Sullivan’s evidence is compelling and draws from multiple sources, including Gorbachev’s archives, John Follain’s “Brezhnev Hatched Plot to Kill Pope,” printed in London’s *Sunday Times*, and Vasili Mitrokhin and Christopher Andrew’s *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB*. Bernstein supplies information about Agca’s criminal history, his public claims to assassinate the Pope and evidence against the Bulgarian secret service. This information raises doubt that Agca simply slipped through the cracks. Weigel focuses less on the possible conspiracy than on the spiritual and

personal repercussions that the attack wrought on John Paul II, arguing that the Pope became more determined to actively support the Solidarity movement following the attack. As Weigel writes, John Paul II came to believe that the Virgin Mary, whom the Polish king declared “Queen of Poland” in 1655 after a Swedish invasion was repulsed, had guided the bullet. Pleshakov provides the historical information regarding Poland’s dedication to the Blessed Mother.

Prior to examining the source information, I assumed that Pope John Paul II’s role in Poland’s internal affairs was highly dependent upon Reagan’s assistance. Further research, however, revealed that the Pope had a more independent role. The original expectation was to find formal, significant interaction and possibly a political pairing-up of the Pope and President Reagan, with the latter providing the real hard power support. This does not seem to be the case, however: most anti-communist measures were conducted independently of one another. Once he became president in 1980, Reagan performed a supportive role concerning the Pope’s anti-communist efforts in Poland rather than usurping the plans that the Pope, having already conducted his first papal visit, had set in motion. This does not discount the meaningful ties that were forged: Reagan and John Paul II met twice in Rome and kept frequent correspondence, both the United States and the Vatican reestablished official diplomatic relations, and confidential information was exchanged through U.S. General Walters and CIA Director Casey. The U.S. and the Vatican were sharing intelligence at unprecedented levels, but the mutual goodwill was not a revolutionary occurrence. According to American consular documents, relations between the two nation-states had been improving for years. Leo Francis Stock’s “Consular Relations Between the United States and the Papal States: Instructions and Despatches,” shows that initial contempt from the Americans gave way to amicable professionalism. Authors tend to exaggerate the

personal relationship between Ronald Reagan and John Paul II, who met only twice, while evidence suggests that the diplomatic pairing was merely a mutually-beneficial acquaintance surrounding shared interests, not a world-changing marriage between America and the Church. Each understood the contributions the other could bring and agreed to come together as means to facilitate that goal.

This analysis concludes with a look at alternative explanations for Poland's peaceful, anti-communist revolution and the Soviet Union's dissolution. Abraham Brumberg's "Poland: The Demise of Communism" focuses on the economic troubles that weakened support for the Soviet Union. This source also covers Jaruzelski's attempts to repair the broken economy. Simon Johnson's "Starting Over: Poland After Communism" treats 1989 as the year that Poland threw off the shackles of Communism, though he provides information on private business growth that started in 1988. Johnson also references Poland's economic reform measures, which were modeled after Gorbachev's implementations. These reforms were initiated between Solidarity's political victory in 1989 and the fall of the U.S.S.R. in 1991, after the institution of similar reforms in Poland.

To examine political intrigue within the U.S.S.R., this study then turns to Amy Knight's "The KGB, Perestroika, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union." Knight emphasizes the subversive actions conducted by the KGB and other conservative Communists who wished to protect the Soviet Union from Gorbachev's reforms. Knight describes the alarm these individuals expressed when they watched the Communist hold on Eastern Europe crumble.

In summary, a careful analysis of the source information reveals that in his three papal visits to the communist nation and his not-so-tacit support for Polish Solidarity, John Paul II

rallied his homeland's majority Catholic population around a common identity. This in turn led to communism's collapse in that nation because of the inherently repressive nature of the Soviet-backed government. When a Polish identity was reborn, the die was cast. The Communist Party could not stop a population that had rallied together. When, in 1989, Eastern Bloc countries rejected Soviet domination in rapid succession, Weigel writes that "the key figure in creating that revolution of conscience had been Pope John Paul II" (*Witness to Hope* 607). The sources may disagree over how large the fire was, but they agree that the Roman pontiff helped set the fire that ended communist rule in Poland and thereby weakened it worldwide. Having thus reviewed the existing literature, this thesis now moves towards a close analysis of the pontiff's role in the hopes of contributing to current scholarship.

## **Research Analysis**

### **I. The Theoretical Basis for Studying Charismatic or "Transforming" Leadership**

The first stage of our analysis inspects the qualities of effective leadership, beginning with those listed in Max Weber's *Economy and Society*. This significant text - the common source for theoretical writing on leadership - outlines three means by which political leaders maintain legitimate authority. The first means is legalism, in which enumerated rules raise an individual above the rest to a commanding position. The second authority is that of tradition; in this case, authority is granted according to traditions. To an extent the Church's ecclesiastic hierarchy fits under this category through its rule-based selection of the pope. There are 125 current voting members in the College of Cardinals, each chosen by the existing pope to elect the next successor to St. Peter. After a pope's death, the Cardinals hold a private conclave where they

choose the next pope through a series of ballots. Through this system, Pope John Paul II rose to hierarchical power, but his temporal power had little influence upon the Poles. He had no political authority to exert. He could preach, but there was no means of demanding obedience through the threat of sanctions. Poles had a choice to listen to him or not; whichever they chose, they would not be punished. Instead, they looked to him as an inspiring moral figure. As a result, Weber's final means of maintaining power, through charisma, is most relevant to our study. As touched upon earlier in this thesis, obedience to this leader type is based upon popular admiration of "exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character," which are qualities that are deemed "not accessible to the ordinary person" but instead granted from Heaven to extraordinary people (Weber 1: 215, 241-242). Historically speaking, these individuals were considered heroes, prophets, magicians or those with tremendous skill. They acquired power because their exceptionalism distinguished them from the rest of the community.

European history is familiar with charismatic authority. The Divine Right of Kings justified the legitimacy of monarchies until the twentieth century, when powerful individuals became the most visible examples of charismatic leadership. The word "charisma" came from a Christian term meaning "gift of grace," derived from the religious concept that God bestowed individuals with the capacity to perform skills, spiritual and otherwise (Weber 1: 216). In Western Europe, a Christian monarch was therefore believed to rule through grace, or "charisma," granted by God. In the seventeenth century, James I of England and French king Louis XVI emphasized this concept by which monarchs governed with divine right. Growing nationalist and democratic movements weakened this theory over time. In the twentieth-century,



Italian fascist Benito Mussolini and German chancellor Adolf Hitler developed cults of personality around themselves with which to rally support.

For the modern conceptual definition, Weber cites Rudolph Sohm's *Kirchenrecht*, first published in 1892. In this work, Sohm defines charisma as didactic yet non-intellectual. "Sohm's charismatics," writes Peter Haley, "teach the word of God: commands, not intellectual assertions about the world (qtd. in Weber 1: 193). Related to orders rather than the proposition of interpretations, charisma, exercised in the political arena, existed within an autocratic context. Charismatic leadership was distinctly Christian before the "post-Christian" Weber, Sohm argues, "emptied the idea, the gift of grace, first of its Christian meaning, finally of all religious content" (Haley 196-197). Weber enlarged charisma's scope to include all seemingly superhuman qualities that marked an individual as a suitable leader, whether in a religious or secular institution. For a contemporary analysis, therefore, the concept can be said to encompass indelible qualities, traditionally viewed as exceptional, that are present within true leaders. From these qualities, leaders solidify their authority over the political system they command.

From both a religious and merit-based perspective, John Paul II was endowed with the talent to incite reform. Yes, he occupied a top-level position within the Church, but the Throne of Peter does not guarantee success. Pope Pius IX discovered this lesson when secular Italian troops easily dispatched the papal armies in 1870, confining him to the one-square mile that now comprises Vatican City. David M. Armstrong, U.S. consul to the Papal States from April 1869 to September 1870, describes the pontiff in his temporal defeat: "No one could imagine a greater fall than his, no greater contrast between the arrogant, infallible Pope of yesterday, and the weak, deserted old man of to day [sic.]" (Stock 359). Contempt aside, Armstrong makes an important

point: being the leader of the Roman Catholic Church does not ensure victory as a leader. Pope John Paul II possessed qualities that were suitable to fostering positive diplomatic and, more generally, interpersonal relations. American journalist Eric Margolis, now writer for *The Huffington Post*, labels him “a vibrant, macho personality” and “a man who wasn’t the soft Italian priest who’d come out of the perfumed shadows of a church somewhere” (qtd. in “John Paul II: The Millennial Pope”). Elected at the age of 58, he was the youngest pope since Pius IX. He was particularly popular among the Catholic youth, who affectionately nicknamed him “JP2.” The Pope drew enormous crowds, including “the single largest crowd in world history of 4,000,000 in the Philippines ... [and] 2,000,000 youth in September, 2000, for the World Youth Day Mass in Rome” (Gregory 270). The event in the Philippines demands attention. The largest gathering in human existence occurred not for purposes of fighting a war or honoring a nation-state but for celebrating the Church and greeting the person who was its ecclesiastical leader: that man was John Paul II.

Numerous accounts depict John Paul II as a person of incredible strength, integrity and rhetorical skill. Individuals both Catholic and non-Catholic, religious and secular were impressed with him. Cambridge Professor Eamon Duffy calls the pope “a bishop with balls” (qtd. in “John Paul II: The Millennial Pope”). The non-religious Elena Bonner, a Russian human rights activist and the wife of Andrei Sakharov, a Soviet nuclear physicist and high-profile defector to the United States, met the Pope in December 1985. Leaving the meeting, she exclaimed, “He’s the most remarkable man I’ve ever met. He is all light, he is a source of light” (Weigel, *The End and the Beginning* 169). John Paul II did far more than impress: he achieved what Burns calls “transforming” leadership, as defined in the literature review. When transforming leadership is

correctly performed, it “raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both” (Burns 20). The people’s goal is not only met, but their leader achieves success in such a way that none remains the same; all involved become better. According to Richard Allen, Reagan’s first national security adviser, the former president believed that “this pope would change the world” (Bernstein, *His Holiness* 270). On the night of the Pope’s death, ABC News reported that tens of thousands had gathered in St. Peter’s Square to mourn him. The same news report quoted former President Bill Clinton, who upon hearing of the Pope’s passing said, “In speaking powerfully and eloquently for mercy and reconciliation to people divided by old hatreds and persecuted by abuse of power, the Holy Father was a beacon of light not just for Catholics, but for all people.” Indeed, Pope John Paul II was an influential figure who was internationally renowned for his positive influence upon global affairs. Within the Church hierarchy, there was no administrative authority higher than the Throne of St. Peter. John Paul II had the location from which to bring about much change and he had the abilities to do just that.

Having established the relationship between charisma and leadership capacity, we must explore what circumstances restrict or encourage a leader’s ability to influence political issues. Whether or not a leader exhibits charismatic qualities is one such circumstance, categorized as a political actor’s “peculiar strengths or weaknesses” (Greenstein 634). In the overview of “The Impact of Personality on Politics: An Attempt to Clear Away Underbrush,” this thesis discussed how an individual’s position within the bureaucratic middle ranks will stunt any attempt at influencing the system. Instead, the person serves as a cog in the institution’s wheel. Causal sequences also suppress the impact of a single individual’s action or “restructuring” (634). An

actor entering the scene in the midst of a political chain reaction will have a limited impact, because multiple factors are already at work. For instance, Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip would have produced less impact on the world stage had he attempted to kill Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in the middle of a global war. Instead, political timing was such that the assassination upset international power alliances, which catapulted the world towards war. Greenstein notes that a political environment's malleability is also determined by the presence of sanctions. Individuals may be less likely to oppose a regime, for instance, if there is the threat of arrest or death. "The impact of personal differences on behavior," Greenstein writes, "is increased to the degree that sanctions are not attached to certain of the alternative possible courses of behavior" (638). Greenstein's last factor is the emotional connection that an individual actor has towards the place where he or she plans to exert authority. The stronger the emotional bond, the more likely a person will have an impact.

These sources have demonstrated the importance of charismatic, or, as Burn writes, "transforming" leadership, as well as the conditions under which such authority will influence international matters. The next step is to analyze whether Pope John Paul II exercised these forms of leadership and met their aforementioned criteria.

## **II. Pope John Paul II's Exercise of Charismatic or "Transforming" Leadership**

To review, this thesis focuses on the time period between October 16, 1979 and April 5, 1989 (for more information, please see the methodology section). Nevertheless, we will also reference events prior to the start of this timeframe, when Pope John Paul II, then Karol Wojtyla, first interacted with the Communist authorities as a priest and later archbishop. Maintaining such

flexibility reflects the understanding that though a man may adopt a new name, the personal qualities that influence his actions as pope took shape years before his election to the pontificate. These qualities, to be discussed later in this thesis, are essential to an analysis of John Paul II's exercise of those qualities that have already been discussed as being suited to an effective leader.

According to Willner's requirements, effective leaders are rhetorical masters, express remarkable, nearly semi-divine talents and forge a personal relationship with the people they lead. This thesis has already touched upon the Pope's masterful rhetoric. What remains unsaid is John Paul II's capable utilization of his talents that reaffirm the bond between him and his Polish contemporaries, to lift them towards a higher standard. Gaddis describes how John Paul II used his talents to "expose the tension between what Poland wanted and how the U.S.S.R. was forcing them to live in a way that denied the Poles' right to self-determination:

Real power rested, during the final decade of the Cold War, with leaders like John Paul II whose mastery of intangibles – of such qualities as courage, eloquence, imagination, determination, and faith – allowed them to expose disparities between what people believed and the systems under which the Cold War obliged them to live. (qtd. in Weigel, *The End and the Beginning* 184)

The Pope attained this exposure through a message that fused nationalist and religious elements. Catholicism was a major part of Polish identity, and so appealing to one overlapped with the other. As Bernstein writes, "For one thousand years the Church had remained the embodiment of Polish nationhood through wars, slaughters, partitions, persecutions and conquests" (*His Holiness* 3). The Church was a source of permanence and an image of Polish resiliency. Having lived through some of Poland's most turbulent times, John Paul II's struggles reflected those of his nation. "I think that the Pope feels the collective experience and the collective suffering of the Polish nation in his bones," says historian Adam Zamoyski (qtd. in "John Paul II: The Millennial

Pope”). This collective memory matches Burns’ requirement that “leadership is nothing if not linked to collective purpose” (3). The Pope knew where his people were coming from, and he had the skill to remind them of their shared battles and how through hope and faith they could endure again.

Greenstein proposes that the individual actor must act within a region that is responsive to change. It is not enough to operate within a familiar region. In Poland, John Paul II became involved in a tumultuous situation. Violent workers’ protests had occurred in the Baltic port of Gdansk in 1970 and 1976. Two years later, the Founding Committee of Free Trade Unions on the Coast was established to urge economic reforms, including higher wages. Strikes began in July 1978, with attention gradually turning towards the creation of an independent trade union (Brown 427-428). It was into this situation that John Paul II flew in June 1979. Though anti-communist protests had begun, the Pope still had a role to play, rallying the population towards peaceful opposition. The sheer number of supporters, three million amassing for his arrival in 1979, illustrates his effect upon the population. According to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency’s World Factbook, based on 2002 data, 89.8 percent of Poles identify themselves as Catholics and 75 percent are practicing. As O’Sullivan writes, “The Polish Church was able to call upon the loyalty of virtually the entire Polish nation -- including the workers and excluding only the [Communists]. That amounted to a highly unstable situation” (17). This instability is the mark of Willner’s concept of a crisis. The very act of having a crisis makes a society more responsive to charismatic leadership. In Soviet-era Poland, an oppressed society was searching for a unifying religious figure, and who better than the highest-profile Pole on the international stage.

According to Greenstein's formula for charismatic leadership, the individual actor must also hold an influential leadership position within the bureaucratic ranks. This top-level position increases the leader's "action dispensability," as defined in the literature review (Greenstein 633). In brief, action dispensability is the likelihood of an action being either imperative or superfluous, according to the circumstances. For 26 years, Pope John Paul II served as bishop of Rome and the pontiff, positions that gave him institutional authority over the Church bureaucracy. With this spiritual responsibility, John Paul II could canonize saints, publish encyclicals regarding matters of conscience (including controversial issues such as abortion, birth control and homosexuality) and, highly consequential to Poland, visit Catholic populations around the world. The most travelled pontiff in Church history, ABC News reported that he visited over one hundred countries. This was the most influential podium a Catholic could hold.

Two of James MacGregor Burns' three leadership criteria remain to be discussed. Burns writes that transforming leaders must satisfy their society's needs and wants while improving the social morality. Regardless of what leaders say they do, measurable change matters most. "Leaders must be judged not by their press clippings but by actual social change measured by intent and by the satisfaction of human needs," says Burns (3). The Pope's visits to Poland rattled the Soviets, whose opinions will be discussed later. His first papal visit was historic, marking the first time a Mass was broadcast on Polish television and revealing the population's widespread dissatisfaction with the Communist regime. In an article republished in *The Guardian* to commemorate the 28th anniversary of the Pope's visit, Pick writes, "It is evident that the Pope's presence has released such deep emotions that the reminder by Mr. Gierek on Saturday of Poland's strong and special links with the Soviet Union paled into routine insignificance" (32).

The Pope's words were not empty. They had an efficacious value that even a secular source was willing to acknowledge, and repeat decades later.

Besides exercising his rhetoric, the Pope also pursued actions that combatted the Communist Party, with positive results. Over the years, John Paul II met privately with Gorbachev, Jaruzelski, Reagan, Walesa, and lesser known figures such as UN under-secretary general Bogdan Lewandowski. He shared intelligence with American authorities. The Pope successfully pressured Solidarity against violent protest. Quite notably, his efforts convinced the U.S.S.R., the nation-state that for decades persecuted the Church, to seek diplomatic relations in February 1985. Ultimately, Poland's Communist government was overthrown, the U.S.S.R. collapsed and John Paul II lived to see it all (he died in 2005). Zamoyski credits the Pope for reminding Poles that freedom was in their hands:

He suddenly turned up amongst these people and said, 'Look, don't be afraid.' They just looked at each other and there were so many people there and suddenly people stopped being afraid. It was like the beginning of the end of the Roman Empire, it was like a pin prick that burst the bubble. After that there's nothing that could be done. And that gave the strength for Solidarity and for the destruction of the whole communist system. (qtd. in "John Paul II: The Millennial Pope")

A higher moral level was reached: the Polish people threw off the yoke of their intolerant, oppressive regime without resulting to war.

### **III. Leadership in Action: The Political Consequences of the Papal Visits**

Having shown John Paul II's legitimacy as a leader, this thesis now moves to analyzing the Pope's anti-communist efforts and weighing them against other contemporary factors. The Communist Party's response to John Paul II was shaped by years of growing animosity between then-Karol Wojtyla and the Soviet puppet government in Poland. Communist documents first



mention Wojtyla in 1967, during an apparently routine evaluation of Polish religious authorities, made in order to discern their threat to one-party rule:

It can safely be said that Wojtyla is one of the few intellectuals in the Polish Episcopate. . . . He has not, so far, engaged in open anti-state political activity. It seems that politics is not his strong suit. . . . He lacks organizing and leadership qualities. (qtd. in Bernstein, *His Holiness* 110)

Communists would grow to distrust the archbishop of Krakow. The future pontiff learned to outsmart the regime. After the Polish government passed regulations that blocked the formation of new parishes, Wojtyla ordered his priests to perform “door-to-door evangelization,” which established unofficial parishes (O’Sullivan 14-15). When these parishes reached a considerable membership, Wojtyla petitioned the Soviet-backed authorities to allow a new church that could support larger numbers. In Nowa Huta, a state-planned communist town where worship centers were banned, Wojtyla successfully rallied support for construction of the Ark church. It still stands today, featuring a steel cross made from, ironically, the Lenin Steelworks. Eberstadt reveals that “intelligence reports to KGB headquarters ... suggest that between 1973 and 1974, Polish prosecutors three times considered arresting Wojtyla and charging him with sedition” (97). In a less confrontational manner, Wojtyla led hikes and kayak trips where he provided parishioners with guidance on sexual ethics. Communist officials never discovered the covert evangelization because he wore civilian clothing. Interestingly enough, none of the couples whom Wojtyla counseled later divorced.

Polish Catholicism’s millennial celebration in 1966 was a pivotal event for Wojtyla. He saw Paul VI humiliated, forbidden from entering the country despite the pontiff’s reassurances that the trip was of “purely religious character” (“Pope Chides Poland”). Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the archbishop of Warsaw and a cultural leader of the Polish Church, appointed

Wojtyla to manage nationwide celebrations in local parishes. This duty earned him national recognition and the documentary “John Paul II: The Millennial Pope” asserts that he “developed his political gifts” during this period. No specific evidence verifies this assertion, however, nor are there reports that tensions escalated between the archbishop and the Communist government during that year.

An effective barometer of John Paul II’s leadership is the sentiments of his political opponents. According to Jaruzelski’s interview with Bernstein, the Politburo, the Soviet Communist Party’s main executive body, ordered an “extraordinary session” within two hours of learning about Wojtyla’s election (qtd. in *His Holiness* 171). Meanwhile, in Poland, bells were ringing in every church to celebrate the new pontiff. Hours later, Stanislaw Kania, the Soviet overseer of Catholic activities in Poland, was warning Poland’s Soviet ambassador that relations with the papacy were about to sour: “If you haven’t been on good terms with Wojtyla up till now ... you can only expect relations with the Vatican to get worse” (Bernstein, *His Holiness* 175). An ill Yuri Andropov, the Soviet General Secretary, was also fretful. In a letter to Jaruzelski during Solidarity’s rise, Andropov warns that “the [Catholic] Church is reawakening the cult of Walesa. . . . In this situation, the most important thing is not to make concessions” (Andrew and Mitrokhin 540). The Soviet leader refers to the Pope’s supporters as a “cult,” identifying them with uniquely supporting the individual of Pope John Paul II rather than the Church in a general sense. Andropov further suggests that the Church, stemming from this alleged personality cult, is changing its policies towards greater confrontation with the Communist Party. Under Pope Paul VI, the Church had engaged the Soviets through *Ostpolitik*, fostering a dialogue with the U.S.S.R. in order to protect Catholics within the empire and perhaps win small concessions. With

John Paul II, however, Andropov urged Jaruzelski not to make concessions. Why? From the beginning, the Soviets expressed wariness. Growing support for the Solidarity movement prompted this letter. Andropov sees room for an alliance between the Pope and Solidarity, a time when two separate interests become one threat to Communist rule.

These interests were physically united in June 1979. When John Paul II planned this visit, his first trip to Poland as pope, he had specific intentions. He would undermine the Soviet authority, but from personal experience knew that he could not assault it directly. The trip's official focus was to "protect the persecuted Christians of the Soviet Bloc and the institutional church serving them. Rome wanted legal agreements with Communist governments that would allow the Vatican to appoint priests and bishops" (O'Sullivan 16). Though the Vatican did not want to antagonize the Soviets, any papal intervention was sure to anger them. Upon hearing of the Pope's arrival, Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev phoned Edward Gierek, leader of the Polish United Workers' Party. "Tell the Pope – he's a wise man – he can declare publicly that he can't come due to illness," said Brezhnev. Gierek declined, arguing that the trip must go on, to which Brezhnev responded, "Do as you wish. But be careful you don't regret it later" (Pleshakov 86). The Soviets understood the repercussions of the Pope's visit. The very act of stepping foot on Polish soil would undermine the Communist Party's ability to regulate the media.

Undermine the Communists it did. Timothy Garton Ash observes that "for nine days the state virtually ceased to exist, except as a censor doctoring the television coverage" (qtd. in Brown 42). Over one million pilgrims filled Krakow's Victory Square for the papal Mass and address, which was broadcast across the country via radio and television. "We want God, we want God," they chanted, leading George Weigel to observe that "a crucial truth had been

clarified by a million Poles' response to John Paul's evangelism. Poland was not a communist country; Poland was a Catholic nation saddled with a communist state" (*Witness to Hope* 295). The Victory Square setting held symbolic power as well. Where the government had held public festivals glorifying Soviet power, John Paul II led his fellow Catholics in the Mass.

Outside of Krakow, the Pope's trip had an even greater impact. A June 10th visit to Bowie attracted over a million pilgrims. Those in attendance included international guests, "two Hungarian cardinals, a Yugoslav, and three more from the West" (Bernstein, *His Holiness* 232). Their inclusion represented the Catholic Church's transnational power and revealed more cracks in the Soviet's regulatory power, which sought to counter Western influence. At the Lenin Shipyard, the pontiff held Mass for six thousand workers, during which he carried a large wooden cross to the site of a monument dedicated to those killed during the 1970 strike (Pleshakov 105). This action signaled the seriousness with which the Pope treated his mission and his ability to skillfully promote a Polish identity that opposed Soviet totalitarianism. The physical carrying of the cross showed the Pope's willingness to symbolically bear the burden of the Polish people. The narrator of "John Paul II: The Millennial Pope" calls Poland "the collective incarnation of Jesus Christ." With this sacrificial gesture, the Pope carried the cross of Communist oppression just as Christ carries humanity's sin. At the end of the road there is death yet hope for rebirth. This gesture captured John Paul II flexing his charismatic authority, rallying his countrymen together in a spirit of solidarity, "in which individual freedom is deployed to serve the common good, and the community sustains and supports individuals as they grow into a truly human maturity" (Wojtyla qtd. in Weigel, *Witness to Hope* 176). This uplifting, uniting role created a spirit of cooperation throughout Poland, gathering segments of the population by

their mutual opposition to the Communists. In this way, Pope John Paul II was a coalition builder. Brown writes that, following his papal visit, a “coalition of social groups and institutions – workers, intellectuals, and the Catholic Church, who had never before come together in a common cause in a communist state, even in Poland – co-operated increasingly effectively” (427). Though not the single catalyst of Solidarity’s birth, John Paul II certainly shaped the spirit of solidarity necessary for it to rise.

The impact of this first visit to Poland can be viewed through the lens of May 13, 1981. While greeting thousands of visitors at St. Peter’s Square, Turkish citizen Mehmet Ali Agca shot the Pope at point-blank range in the abdomen. The pontiff survived, and the official medical diagnosis was “a perforated colon and five wounds in the small intestine” (O’Sullivan 66-67). Agca received a nineteen-year prison sentence and John Paul II famously visited him in prison, but mystery surrounded Agca’s motives for years afterward. Were there others involved? Was the Soviet Union behind the attack? The literature does not shy from blaming the Communists. Timothy R. Stebbins and Thomas P. Melady, the former U.S. ambassador to the Vatican argue that the Vatican’s support for the Solidarity movement, which “swelled to over ten million people” following the Pope’s visit, led the Soviets to plan the attack (59). This is not conspiratorial hypothesizing. Evidence suggests that Melady and Stebbins may be correct. John Paul II was not without high-profile enemies within the Soviet Politburo. Two general secretaries, Brezhnev and Andropov, considered the Pope a threat. Andropov, writes O’Sullivan, “held the absurd and even naive belief that the Pope’s election was part of a Western intelligence plot to destabilize Soviet rule” (77). The Central Committee approved a plan of action against the new pope on November 13, 1979. The six-point “Decision to Work against the Policies of the

Vatican in Relation with Socialist States” deployed the notorious KGB secret police against the Vatican’s “religious fanaticism” (Bernstein, *His Holiness* 308). Two years later, the first papal visit became the Soviets’ nightmare scenario. Not only did the trip rally the population behind Solidarity, it revealed the Communists’ inability to control massive public rallies. Perhaps the trip was enough to motivate an already paranoid U.S.S.R. into action.

The search for culpability lasted decades. In the 1980s, an Italian parliamentary inquiry acquitted Sergei Antonov, the alleged Bulgarian agent whom Agca identified as a co-conspirator. Agca had argued that Antonov entered St. Peter’s Square with him, but Agca had argued that he was across town. Evidence for Bulgarian involvement surfaced when the U.S. National Security Agency discovered that coded messages from Bulgaria’s Roman embassy to the Bulgarian secret service significantly increased during March and April before dramatically decreasing two weeks prior to the attack (Bernstein, *His Holiness* 303). Italy’s defense ministry found a similar increase in radio traffic from Bulgaria into Italy. In 2002, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi established the Mitrokhin Commission, named after the KGB member who defected to Western Europe a decade earlier and revealed then-defunct Soviet spy rings. The Commission cited evidence from French judge Jean Louis-Brugiere, who presided over an inquiry into terrorist Carlos the Jackal.

According to Brugiere, former spies traced the attack command to the Politburo, under General Secretary Brezhnev. Furthermore, Magistrate Ferdinando Imposimato cites evidence that Carlos the Jackal, who received protection from the KGB and East German security forces, the Stasi, simultaneously stayed at the same home in Sofia, Bulgaria (Andrew and Mitrokhin 639). Then there is the matter of photographic evidence. A man in the crowd near Agca remained unidentified until the creation of computer recognition software. The person was then identified

as Antonov, negating his alibi; nevertheless, since Antonov could not be retried under double-jeopardy grounds, the discovery had no legal significance (O'Sullivan 79-80; Follain).

Criminological technology was too late.

A last piece in the puzzle of the assassination belongs to Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, the former Vatican Secretary of State. According to communication between Casaroli and U.S. Ambassador Melady, the United States had offered to lead an investigation concerning the failed assassination attempt, but the Pope declined. As a rationale, Casaroli cited the Pope's on-going talks with Gorbachev as justification for the refusal:

John Paul was asking the Soviet leader to carry out reforms establishing freedom of religion and human rights. . . . He did not want to spoil this cautious Vatican diplomacy by raking up a grave scandal that principally involved Gorbachev's late predecessor Leonid Brezhnev. (Melady)

Cardinal Casaroli's high-profile revelation expresses more than John Paul II's pragmatic desire to solve substantive, current issues rather than rehash old wounds. Casaroli gives away the Pope's opinion on Soviet involvement. John Paul II believed the U.S.S.R. was behind the failed assassination, "the grave scandal," but sought not to embarrass the very nation to which he was reaching out.

The Soviet Union certainly had motive to kill the Pope. At least one influential Politburo official realized that revolution in Poland would devastate the cohesiveness of the entire Soviet empire and that the Catholic Church was to blame. Defense Minister Ustinov considered bloodshed "unavoidable" to preserve Communist rule in Poland, and if the U.S.S.R. would not commit to this "we could lose all the achievements of socialism" (Bernstein, *His Holiness* 277). Jaruzelski recalls that Brezhnev was meanwhile blaming the Church:

He said the Church was expanding its influence and making matters more difficult in Poland, yet we were giving so many building permits for churches that we were surrendering to the Church. And the Church, after all, was our enemy, Brezhnev said; sooner or later it would gag in our throats, it would suffocate us. (qtd. in *His Holiness* 274)

Nevertheless, motive is not enough, and Jaruzelski's words reveal more questions than answers.

Jaruzelski cites Brezhnev's main anger upon church construction, not the Pope himself.

Regardless of the speculation and circumstantial evidence, a lack of direct evidence threatens to keep the 1981 incident shrouded in mystery. Yes, the photographic evidence reveals flaws in the parliamentary inquiry and, considered with the spike in coded messages, supports the case for a Bulgarian connection. Nevertheless, when the Pope turned down the American offer for an investigation, he let sleeping dogs lie. This thesis does not seek to prove Soviet involvement in the assassination attempt. The thesis seeks only to prove the effectiveness of the Pope's intervention in Poland and the connection between the downfall of the Communist Party in Poland and the downfall of the Soviet Union.

Regardless of the suggested Soviet plot against the Pope, that the Politburo considered him a threat shows how far his impact was felt, even to Moscow. This effect, and the Pope's commitment to reform in Poland, was reasserted with each subsequent papal visit. The second pilgrimage, lasting from June 16 to June 23, 1983, inspired hope during what was a dark period for Poles. On December 13, 1982, to combat an alleged *coup d'état* by Solidarity, General Jaruzelski imposed martial law. In the months that followed, "6,000 leaders of Solidarity were detained; hundreds were charged with treason, subversion and counterrevolution; nine were killed; and the union was banned. But thousands of others went into hiding, many seeking protection in churches, rectories and with priests" (Bernstein, "The Holy Alliance"). Despite the



crackdown, the Polish government allowed John Paul II to make a second papal visit and meet with the imprisoned Walesa. The Communists would not make this second reunion an easy one, however. Polish interior minister Czeslaw Kiszczak engaged in childish name-calling during negotiations with the Vatican's Jesuit trip planner, Father Roberto Tucci. Refusing to call the Pope by name, Kiszczak instead labeled him "the man with the big family" and demanded to know why he "wants to meet with [Walesa] who doesn't represent anybody in this country" (Weigel, *The End and the Beginning* 160). In exchange for the face-to-face meeting with Walesa, General Jaruzelski convinced the Pope to accept a private meeting, a record of which was never published. Jaruzelski also blocked the Pope from visiting Gdansk and Szczecin on the Baltic coast, Solidarity's birthplace.

Despite the militant political situation and more vocal Soviet opposition, the second pilgrimage broke new ground. Verifying the KGB's concern that the Polish government's power was weakening, Jaruzelski allowed "large, open-air [Masses] in Krakow and Katowice," raising fears of "inflaming religious fanaticism among the working class" (Weigel, *The End and the Beginning* 159-160). The Marian celebration, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, embodied a worst-case scenario in the Soviets' minds and an affront to their ideological sensibilities. Before a two-million person crowd, John Paul II explicitly called for Polish sovereignty based "on the liberties of the citizenry" (Pleshakov 132). In the midst of this large-scale religious festival, which to the Communist Party was a massive public demonstration, the Pope called for a democratic government, implying the need to oust the current one. Had John Paul II been a Solidarity leader, Polish authorities could and probably would have arrested him immediately. Because of his unique position and command of such large numbers, however, he was untouchable. Under no

other imaginable circumstances could a figure publicly denounce the current political state of affairs in a communist country. As John Paul II discusses in *Spiritual Pilgrimage*, immediately following his speech at St. John's Cathedral, tens of thousands of Catholic supporters "marched from the cathedral past Communist Party headquarters chanting, 'So-li-dar-nosc, So-li-dar-nosc,' 'Lech-wa-le-sa, Lech-Wa-lesa'" (qtd. in Weigel 461). The Communists' worst fears were coming true: Solidarity and the Church were joining forces, becoming one movement to overthrow Soviet influence.

Political fallout from the trip was swift. Within a month, Jaruzelski caved under pressure and lifted martial law on July 21. This occurred despite a furious letter from Yuri Andropov, the new Communist general secretary. The following December, Lech Walesa received the Nobel Peace Prize. In his acceptance speech before the international community, Walesa vowed to defend human dignity from inhuman economic policies. Quoting the pontiff, he urged for the Communist Party to accept dialogue with Solidarity:

'Why do the working people in Poland – and everywhere else for that matter – have the right to such a dialogue? It is because the working man is not a mere tool of production, but he is the subject which throughout the process of production takes precedence over the capital'. . . . My most ardent desire is that my country will recapture its historic opportunity for a peaceful evolution and that Poland will prove to the world that even the most complex situations can be solved by a dialogue and not by force. (Walesa)

Though John Paul II was not present at the ceremony, his words were heard. He was not far from the mind of the shipyard worker whose dedication to peaceful revolution earned him the Nobel Prize. Walesa and the man he quotes had humiliated the Communist regime and survived to rally the Polish population around democratic ideals.

When John Paul II arrived in Poland for a third pilgrimage in June 1987, he discovered a changed nation. Five months prior, Jaruzelski had met with the Pope in Rome. “There is no future for the party or the Communist system in Poland,” he told the pontiff (Bernstein, *His Holiness* 457). That February, the Soviet-backed government promised to open dialogue with the Catholic Church. The mood surrounding the new pilgrimage was lighter and more festive. Writes Bernstein, “Pope John Paul II was cheered by millions of his countrymen as he traveled across Poland demanding human rights and praising Solidarity” (“The Holy Alliance”). The Soviet state, once the feared authoritarian regime that Karol Wojtyla had struggled to circumvent, the government that had squelched the Solidarity movement and arrested thousands of its members, had become irrelevant. The renewed sense of courage, uninhibited by the threat of sanctions, is evident in John Paul II’s words to his secretary, Stanislaw Dziwisz. Petitioning for a visit to Gdansk, denied him in 1983, the Pope delivered an ultimatum: “If I can’t go to Gdansk, I can’t go to Poland. If I don’t go to Gdansk, I’ll just be an instrument of the communists (Weigel, *The End and the Beginning* 172). Needless to say, the pontiff visited Gdansk.

From the first to third papal visit, John Paul II’s presence motivated the Polish people, shaping an environment that supported those pursuing freedom from authoritarianism. The Pope undermined the Communist stranglehold over all aspects of Polish identity, its nationhood, religious freedom and socioeconomic well-being. Ultimately he laid the groundwork for Solidarity, which defeated the Communist Party in Poland once and for all. Nevertheless, John Paul II was not without allies. For this reason, this thesis now shifts to examining the Pope’s ties with the Soviet Union’s rival superpower, the United States.

#### **IV. The Extent of the American-Vatican Alliance**

Before he became President of the United States, then-California Governor Ronald Reagan watched the TV coverage of John Paul II's first pilgrimage. In Reagan's mind, this event solidified the Catholic Church's power within Poland. Richard Allen, Reagan's first national security adviser and a Catholic, recalls watching the news coverage with the governor:

John Paul was walking among vast, enthusiastic crowds who greeted him not only as their pontiff but also as their national savior. . . . The regimes representatives, apart from a ceremonial welcome at the airport, had all but disappeared. Security and organization for the Pope's visit were provided by thousands of Catholic volunteers. At that moment – and for the duration of the visit – the Pope was the effective government of Poland ... Allen left the meeting convinced that Reagan, like himself, had seen the papal visit as a first, massive crack in the impressive facade of Soviet power. (O'Sullivan 91-92)

Once Reagan became president, certain that the Pope's role could dramatically alter the balance of power in Eastern Europe, Reagan healed a historically tense diplomatic relationship with the Vatican. Between 1797 and 1868, the United States had maintained communication with the Roman pontiff, but assigned no ambassador to mediate. Early America looked upon the papacy with scorn, opposing its perceived moral tyranny and negotiating solely for trade purposes. In a letter to the Continental Congress in 1779, John Adams, the future president, predicted that "Congress will probably never send a Minister to His Holiness who can do them no service, upon condition of receiving a Catholic legate or nuncio; or, in other words, an ecclesiastical tyrant which, it is to be hoped, the United States will be too wise ever to admit into their territories" (Stock xxiii). Interactions between the Americans and Vatican officials warmed throughout the nineteenth century, however. During Martin Van Buren's administration, 1837 to 1841, the consul expressed his confidence in the two nations' "friendly relations" (Stock 25). But when the Italian government seized papal lands in 1870, trapping the Pope in present-day Vatican

City, diplomacy with the United States was broken. This lapse coincided with “a period of heightening anti-Catholic sentiment in the United States spurred by Anglo-Saxon fears related to the large number of Catholic immigrants from Ireland, France and Italy, who were entering the country” (Melady and Stebbins 57). President Franklin Roosevelt amended relations, appointing a special envoy to the Vatican in 1939. Diplomacy lapsed during the Truman Administration, and continued until President Jimmy Carter renewed the sending of special envoys in 1977. Reagan continued the resurrected practice until 1984, when the United States and Vatican City formally established bilateral diplomatic relations. Though relations between the two nations had been improving since Carter, Reagan’s decision to send ambassadors to Pope John Paul II marked significant progress from America’s historic treatment of the Catholic Church.

Reagan and John Paul II constructed a working relationship that focused but was not limited to restructuring the Polish government. The Pope had more influence in altering Poland’s political situation, having conducted his historic first pilgrimage over a year before Reagan became president. Nevertheless, the political relationship was mutually beneficial. “Neither the Pope’s soft-power revolution nor Reagan’s hard-power challenge could have done the job by itself,” writes Weigel (“The President and the Pope” 24). Evidence suggests that John Paul II would have dramatically altered Polish politics without American aid, but the partnership with the United States did accelerate the Soviet-backed regime’s collapse. Before the Communist government loosened its grip on Solidarity, agreeing to semi-free elections in 1989, the union movement survived through a secret international network that Reagan and the Pope created. Bernstein discusses this laundry list of contraband, brought across Polish borders by AFL-CIO representatives, European labor officials and Catholic priests: “fax machines (the first in Poland),

printing presses, transmitters, telephones, shortwave radios, video cameras, photocopiers, telex machines, computers, word processors” (“The Holy Alliance”). Funds for Solidarity came from joint work between the CIA and the non-profit National Endowment for Democracy.

The two leaders also maintained consistent communication throughout Reagan’s two presidential terms, from 1981 to 1989. The first meeting between Reagan and John Paul II occurred on June 7, 1982. While the two discussed anti-communist strategy, U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig and National Security Adviser William Clark, both Catholic, briefed the Vatican’s secretary of state, Cardinal Casaroli, and Archbishop Achille Silvestrini about the recent Israeli invasion of Lebanon (Bernstein, “The Holy Alliance”). This incident suggests that the diplomatic channels were not limited to Polish politics, but that a general relationship existed.

Following the implementation of martial law, communication became more frequent. Haig sent Ambassador-at-large Vernon Walters to Rome on approximately twelve visits to Rome, many to discuss sanctions against the U.S.S.R. Casey used the Vatican as a stop-over point during flights to Europe and the Middle East. CIA Director William Casey would routinely stop in Rome on his way to Europe and the Middle East. This communication system ensured that Reagan and John Paul II, though only able to meet once more, in 1987, remained informed about international matters, specifically regarding the political situation in Poland.

Despite this seemingly co-equal information-sharing, the United States understood that the Vatican could respond to developments within Poland quickly and efficiently. According to Alexander Haig, “The Vatican's information was absolutely better and quicker than ours in every respect. Though we had some excellent sources of our own, our information was taking too long to filter through the intelligence bureaucracy” (qtd. in Bernstein, “The Holy Alliance”).

According to the Pope's deputy secretary of state, Cardinal Silvestrini, the Vatican utilized pre-established connections with Church officials to direct information between Solidarity and the United States. In this regard, John Paul II served as a messenger to the United States, a middle man in America's anti-communist efforts.

Both the Vatican and the United States assisted each other in gathering intelligence. Their strong diplomatic relationship permitted needed supplies to reach the underground Solidarity movement, allowing it to survive during the period of martial law. Weigel is careful not to exaggerate John Paul II's alliance with Reagan. Criticizing Bernstein, who to his defense provides an exhaustive study of American-Vatican diplomacy during the 1980s, Weigel writes that "the hard, chronological fact of the matter is that John Paul II did his maximum damage to the Communist enterprise during his epic first pilgrimage to Poland in June 1979, 19 months before Reagan became president ("The President and the Pope" 23). Reagan entered the political scene after John Paul II had motivated Poland's Catholic population to support peaceful reform. Returning to Greenstein, a political leader is less likely to influence political events that have already begun to change. Comparatively speaking, John Paul II had more time, more established communication networks within Poland and more direct contact with its population than Reagan. Therefore, Vatican City served as a more influential factor in Polish politics, though American support cannot be denied.

## **V. Alternative Explanations**

With the greater part of our analysis complete, it is worthwhile to briefly discuss the alternative explanations for the Communist Party's decline in both Poland and the Soviet Union.

To be clear, this thesis does not aim to prove whether these other hypotheses are valid, only that they deserve acknowledgment. The first rival explanation is economic. Financial hardships significantly weakened communist ideology and made the capitalist West a more attractive model. The Communist response to Poland's tepid economic performance was unoriginal and futile. In 1980, "with Poland's foreign debt mounting and the country facing shortages that left millions without coal to heat their homes, the government turned once again to its familiar formula of wage freezes and price increases," writes Bernstein (*His Holiness* 237). The strategy failed and strikes erupted in July 1980. Opposition groups formed around Solidarity, including the Workers Defense Committees (KOR). These strikes led to the Gdansk Accords in August 31, 1980, which established Solidarity as a legitimate trade union. Of course, Solidarity's honeymoon was short-lived and martial law was imposed the following December. Later in the decade, Jaruzelski appointed Mieczyslaw Rakowski to jumpstart the economy. His efforts failed, "inflation continued to soar, productivity declined even further, and patchwork solutions, such as increasing the import of consumer goods, had to be scrapped for lack of hard currency" (Brumberg 71). Ultimately the communist system would be swapped for a market-based economy. This economic unrest does not disprove the Pope's influence, however, and fits comfortably alongside it. John Paul II's first papal visit created a hospitable place for economic opposition and political opposition as well, once the population realized that the Communists could not fight the Poles' numerical advantage. Furthermore, he raised their spirits and provided hope, so they would one day take to the streets believing change was possible. Other nations, in turn, saw Poland's peaceful transition towards democracy and followed suit.



Broader economic troubles within the U.S.S.R. likely contributed to its downfall. War in Afghanistan sapped the Soviets Union's financial coffers while the empire was desperately competing against American military expansion. In 1986, the Soviet Union under Gorbachev instituted pro-market reforms. Poland adopted similar reforms in January 1990, and results were positive. In the *Harvard Business Review*, Johnson reports that "the number of private business corporations [had] increased [in Poland] from 1,275 in 1988 to 11,693 at the end of 1989, 33,239 at the end of 1990, and 45,077 by the end of 1991" (54). Entrepreneurs formed businesses in record numbers in Poland and Russia alike, improving economic freedom but undermining the Soviet command structure. Better economic opportunities and a healthier business climate spelled disaster for the Communist Party, which saw momentum swift from its stagnant ideology to capitalism's thriving cure.

Internal discord is another plausible explanation for the U.S.S.R.'s collapse. Hardliners, including top-level members of the KGB, looked with horror as Eastern Europe pursued independence. Meanwhile, capitalist reforms were weakening centralized power. These fervent Communists blamed Gorbachev, and in 1990 the KGB began plotting against him. According to Knight, KGB head Vladimir Kryuchkov sabotaged the general secretary that same year, "feeding Gorbachev with alarming disinformation and secretly arranging for the use of force in areas like the Baltics" (67). On June 12, 1991, the reform-minded Boris Yeltsin was elected Russian president. Five days later, the concerned Soviet prime minister, Valentin Pavlov, warned officials of a crisis. He joined seven other conspirators in overthrowing Gorbachev, a failed plot carried out in August. Though Gorbachev retained his title, he had nevertheless lost his authority. On

December 25, Gorbachev resigned from office, Yeltsin ascended to the presidency, and the next day the Soviet Union officially entered the history books.

The power struggle that ended with the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. existed not as a separate factor, but as a consequence of economic turmoil. The battle between the traditional Communists like Pavlov and reformers was a consequence of Gorbachev's new economic policies, which threatened communist power. The reforms were only implemented because of the economy's grim state. Therefore, claiming that Communist Party fractures singularly caused the U.S.S.R.'s collapse holds no water. The economic problem is the most serious alternative explanation. An economic reason does not invalidate the argument that Pope John Paul II played a major role in Poland's liberation from Communist rule and, therefore, in the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The trail from Dec. 25, 1991 runs to April 5, 1989, which leads to June 2, 1979, though many roads may have led to Moscow on that fatal Christmas Day.

## **Conclusion**

On Nov. 9, 2009, to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, German chancellor Angela Merkel led a special celebration. The festivities featured a long series of painted dominos stretching along what had been the notorious divider between the capitalist West and communist East. The man who pushed the first domino, which triggered the rest, was Lech Walesa. On the domino was written in German, "Es begann in Polen," or "It began in Poland" (Stadler). In *His Holiness*, Bernstein includes comments from an interview with Walesa, who states that "without the Church, nothing could happen" (*His Holiness* 255). Evidence suggests that Walesa was right. Pope John Paul II may not have felled the Soviet Union alone, but using the powers of his charismatic leadership and position within the Church hierarchy

during a crucial point in Polish history, he set the stage for Solidarity to overthrow Poland's Communist regime and trigger a series of events culminating in the U.S.S.R.'s sudden demise.

Pope John Paul II utilized his personal connection with the struggling Polish population, formed a strong diplomatic relationship with the United States and mobilized support for the fledgling Solidarity movement. Ultimately, this movement would rise to power, altering the Polish political structure. In 1989, Solidarity defeated the Soviet-backed regime through the hard-power political influence that John Paul II, being leader of the Catholic Church, could not exert. Nevertheless, through his three visits to Poland, the Pope rallied the overwhelmingly Catholic population with a spirit of hope and optimism, demanding a freer political system for his homeland. The pontiff was by no means the single catalyst behind the end to communism in Poland and across the world. Even he could not foresee communism's rapid disintegration in 1989. As Cardinal Dziwisz relates, "John Paul II wasn't expecting it. Yes he did think that the system was doomed to collapse sooner or later because it was so socially unjust and economically inefficient. But the Soviet Union was still a geopolitical, military, and nuclear power" (Pleshakov 155). Whether he saw the magnitude of his own influence or not, John Paul II, through exercising the charismatic leadership he embodied as the Catholic Church's hierarchal head and a leading cultural figure within Poland, accelerated the worldwide fire that brought a superpower's oppressive reign to an end.

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