



LESSON PLAN: Pope John Paul II's Complicated Legacy

HANDOUT: Background and Glossary

In 1978, when Karol Wojtyla, the 58-year-old archbishop of Krakow, Poland, was elected to head the *Vatican*, he became the youngest *pope* of the 20th century.

Wojtyla, now known as John Paul II, has had not only an exceptionally long tenure as pope (his predecessor, John Paul, died after holding the position for only 33 days), but also a well-traveled one.

Since his *ordination*, John Paul II has visited more than 100 countries world wide, including many ravaged by war, poverty and political strife. During those visits, John Paul II has made himself remarkably accessible to the people, often immersing himself in the throngs of admirers and worshippers.

This wish to be close to the public, however, has not been without consequence.

In 1981, John Paul II was shot and seriously wounded by Turkish extremist Mehmet Ali Agca in St. Peter's Square, Rome.

As an expression of compassion, though, John Paul II later met with the man face-to-face and forgave him for his act.

Other hallmarks of this pope's legacy will include the instrumental role he played in the ending of *communism* in Eastern Europe; his unprecedented admission of guilt for the Catholic Church's treatment of Muslims and Jews during the *Inquisition*; his willingness to concede that the Vatican was remiss in helping the victims of *Nazi* atrocities during World War II; his official visit to communist Cuba and its dictator, *Fidel Castro*; and his attempts to bridge gaps to other religions, including the *Eastern Orthodox Church*, *Islam* and *Judaism*;

Accompanying John Paul II's numerous accomplishments, though, is considerable controversy.

He has recently decried the wave of movement in the United States towards legalizing gay marriage; he has spoken out strongly against allowing priests to marry; he is steadfast in his opposition to women being ordained as priests; and he is unrelenting in his stance against family planning or contraception.

The Vatican has also been criticized for its initial reluctance to formally condemn the American Catholic Church for the widespread sexual misconduct among its clergy.

Overall, Pope John Paul II has been recognized during his tenure for his closeness to the public, for his outspoken views on the oppression of human rights and for his intense desire to maintain longstanding social structures and hierarchies.

If anything, John Paul II has been clear and unwavering in his views on a broad range of issues.

Glossary (All definitions taken from encarta.msn.com)

Castro, Fidel: (1926-) Cuba's leader since 1959. Fidel Castro claimed power in 1959 following the [Cuban Revolution](#), an armed revolt that overthrew the dictatorship of [Fulgencio Batista](#). He became prime minister of Cuba in 1961 and shortly thereafter cancelled elections and suspended Cuba's constitution. Castro ruled without regard for the 1940 constitution until 1976, when the nation enacted a new constitution that allowed limited electoral participation by Cuban voters. Cuba's National Assembly elected Castro president of the country in 1976

Communism: 1. the Marxist-Leninist version of a classless society in which capitalism is overthrown by a working-class revolution that gives ownership and control of wealth and property to the state 2. any system of government in which a single, usually totalitarian, party holds power, and the state controls the economy

Eastern Orthodox Church: Christian churches of Eastern Europe: the self-governing Orthodox Christian churches that originated in the Byzantine Empire and recognize the Patriarch of Constantinople as primate. They now comprise the churches of Eastern Europe, Russia, and Greece

Inquisition: Tribunal for judging heretics: an organization in the Roman Catholic Church founded in the 13th century to find, question, and sentence those who did not hold orthodox religious beliefs. The Spanish Inquisition lasted until the 19th century and was known for its harsh punishments and use of torture

Islam: Muslim religion: the religion of Muslims, based upon the teachings of Muhammad during the 7th century and now the second largest of the great religions in number of believers

Judaism: Religion of the Jews: the religion of the Jews that has its basis in the Bible and the Talmud. In Judaism, God is the creator of everything and the source of all goodness

Nazi: Follower of Hitler: a member of the German National Socialist Party that came to power under the leadership of Adolf Hitler in 1933

Ordination: Consecration as Christian minister or rabbi: an official investiture as a Christian priest or minister, or as a rabbi, or a ceremony during which somebody is consecrated as a priest, minister, or rabbi

Pope (or pope): Roman Catholic Church head: the head of the Roman Catholic Church and bishop of Rome

Vatican: 1. Pope's residence: the palace in the Vatican City that is used as the official residence of the pope and the administrative center of the papacy 2. pope's authority: the authority and jurisdiction of the pope