

## HE WASN'T ALL BAD – May 2005

— By Richard L. Kiniry

The Pope is dead and most of us are sick of the orgy of unreflective sentimentality about John Paul's life. It was worse than the Reagan funeral. The Pope we remember as a reactionary and who held a view of reality that didn't make sense five hundred years ago, was idealized as the wise father figure. Without a doubt he was a person of character; he lived what he believed. But he seems to have thought that loving theoretical people and hugging actual people was enough. The life of those people did not have to actually get better.

But believe it or not: this column is about appreciating Karol Wojtyla. Besides being a man of character, he was not shy about expressing progressive opinions on economic justice, the War in Iraq and the death penalty. The Catholic Church is a complicated institution, not a little schizophrenic in its wish to address contemporary problems while insisting on the truth of its ancient beliefs and rituals. Now that the Pope is buried, we are starting to hear more balanced reporting about his papal career. In his authoritarian style he stifled the democratic approach of the Vatican Council. He failed many people in his denial of equality to women. He legitimized the hatred of homosexuals. In his opposition to birth control, he contributed to the spread of both poverty and AIDS. And his pursuance of the hundreds of priests who victimized children (and of the bishops who brushed it under the rug) was lukewarm at best.

Of his more positive side, from our more progressive perspective, we have heard little of the Pope's challenges to Western Capitalism. We have heard endlessly of his role in creating an environment for the collapse of Communism, but not heard about his appreciate of aspects of Communism. When he visited the Baltic States after the collapse of the Soviet system, he announced to the crowds that there was a kernel of truth in Marxism. As opposed to the capitalist system, Marxism refused to put a price tag on everything. The Pope appreciated that as bad as the Soviet system was, the Marxist philosophy that it supposedly enshrined was value based. It was concerned that people live purposeful lives in a shared community that served all. People were not primarily economic units.

There is good in everyone, but the media seems to want to ignore what we would consider Karol Wojtyla's good points. We are offered a whitewashed, American version of the Pope. We don't hear of his disapproval of our consumer lifestyle or of globalization. We don't hear about the Pope wagging his finger at George Bush's face to stress his opposition to the Iraq War. America may not have heard but there was another side to John Paul's message. We can only hope his successor will speak that message loud enough to make the evening news.