

# Papalmania

By Bud Talbert

Many are struggling to understand why there has been such an international outpouring of interest in the passing of Pope John Paul II (Karol Wojtyla, pronounced *voitiua*). Some have watched the effusive news coverage (and it has been effusive in the extreme). Millions have seen the hundreds of thousands of mourners viewing his body in state and have followed the events of his passing closely. What does all of this mean? What are we to think of this man?

Part of this sensation, at least, is due to the advancements in communications technology which make knowledge of the events surrounding his life, sickness and death instantly known globally. John Paul II was the first multimedia pope, and he put that media to good use in publishing his name, his philosophy and his activities throughout the world. But this was more than just a media blitz.

It is estimated that at least hundreds of millions of people around the world followed the events of the last week. Some four million people from all over the world invaded Rome to attend the funeral, two million from the pope's native Poland alone. Seventeen reigning royalty, 57 heads of state, 13 representatives of international organizations, 24 ambassadors and 142 non-Catholic religious leaders disrupted their schedules so that they could attend. Some 300,000 gathered in St. Peter's Square, leaving the other 3.7 million scattered throughout Rome viewing the event on 27 closed circuit monitors. It was, reporters said, the biggest funeral in modern times and the greatest religious pilgrimage ever.

The pomp of the event was staggering. Scarlet-ropes prelates, superfluously ornate buildings, and thousands of distinguished dignitaries were all punctuated by lavish comment from media correspondents. It was not a funeral. It was an event, a world event. When the coffin was placed before the altar, there was prolonged spontaneous applause from the throng. The service was interrupted again at the end of the three-hour mass when a cheer went up throughout the piazza repeating "*Vive Papa!*" (long live the pope) He was called the Polish superstar, a phenomenon. One London woman captured the thinking of millions when she commented: "*I didn't want to be home watching the funeral. I wanted to be with other people to get some kind of feeling.*" This is what has been present around the world this last week – some kind of feeling that has ranged from ridiculous to eerily strange.

What has caused this emotion? There is no denying that Karol Wojtyla made a difference in the events of this world during his tenure as pope. He is a remarkable man in his own right. Bishop Fred Henry, in his memorial mass for John Paul II in Calgary, pointed out that he was a scholar, a writer, a poet, a linguist, and a statesman. And in many of these areas he excelled. He held the third longest pontificate in history – 26 years. He traveled to 137 countries, and was easily the most effective ambassador of Romanism the church has ever known. His influence helped to topple communism in Poland and other central European countries. He curbed the Marxist Liberation Theology that had invaded Romanism. He was an outspoken advocate of political peace, in spite of his naïveté. Many even outside the Catholic Church agreed with his conservative stand on moral issues such as abortion, homosexuality, divorce, and pornography. He was a courageous man, a compassionate man, a man dedicated to what he believed was his mission in the world. These virtues make him admirable as a human being, however much one may disagree with him otherwise.

But Karol Wojtyla was devoted to a religious system which has for more than a millennium been firmly dedicated in its opposition to Biblical Christianity. Romanism still denies that justification is by grace through faith alone. Today it zealously teaches the meritorious efficacy of the church's sacraments. This core Catholic belief sets the church in "blunt opposition" to the gospel of Christ. This pope himself was keenly devoted to Mariolatry. The insignia on his coffin was a cross with an "M" for Mary. During his reign as pope he expressed his favor of naming Mary as co-redeemer with Christ. He practiced and strongly advocated the unbiblical practice of prayer to canonized saints. This lesson was well learned, for at his funeral Anna Wankowsky said, "*Throughout the rest of our lives we will be praying to him.*" He daily performed the mass, a persistent re-offering of Christ's one-time sacrifice for sin. In spite of the fact that Catholic dogma contains the Christian tenets of the deity of Christ, His death on the cross for the sins

of mankind, His resurrection from the dead and His ascension into heaven, its explanation of those truths in connection with the doctrine of salvation falls far short of genuine Christianity. Karol Wojtyla occupied for twenty-six years the most influential and responsible office in this religious system. John Ratzinger, long time confidant of the pope and dean of the College of Cardinals, in his homily at the funeral claimed, “*We can be sure that our beloved Pope is now at the window of the house of his father – and he sees us and blesses us.*” If he trusted in Romanism for his salvation, however, he is eternally lost.

Perhaps the pope’s largest legacy is the advancement of ecumenism. Karol Wojtyla did more to promote religious ecumenism than almost any other man in recent history, and certainly more than any other pope in history. This, too, was evident in the many comments to reporters. Father John Murphy of Calgary said, “*The pope was the ultimate shepherd for the entire church and the world.*” Asseman Omer Alain, age 40, from Ivory Coast claimed, “*All religions were the same to him. He made no difference between Christian or Muslim.*” Nadezhda Chekova, a middle-aged Russian teacher of Orthodox faith, opined, “*I liked his idea of unifying the churches (Catholic ad Orthodox).*” One article noted that “*throughout Asia, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs joined Catholics in church services and prayers to honor the pontiff.*” Even the Dali Lama urged people to continue John Paul’s legacy of peace. John Paul was not promoting the unity of Christians only. He was promoting the unity of all world religions. Who would the leader of such a vast body be?

The pope willingly accepted the fawning admiration and confessions of Evangelical Christians from around the world. In a betrayal of the gospel they claim to serve, many Evangelical leaders have echoed the sentiments of Billy Graham who openly regarded this pope as the greatest man of God in the world. It is nothing less than shocking how many Protestants today regard the Catholic Church as Christian, and the Pope *ipso facto* a saved man. These certainly were not the convictions of the Reformers whom Evangelicals claim to follow. Evangelicalism and Karol Wojtyla have succeeded in removing the protest, and in doing so have betrayed the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The true church has grown poorer and weaker while Wojtyla has vastly strengthened the hegemony of the Roman Catholic Church.

Let’s give credit where it is due. Karol Wojtyla was in many ways a very remarkable man. But at the same time let’s not be deceived about what he was and what he represented. He accepted the title *Vicar of Christ*. That means that he represents Jesus Christ. Yet he neither represented the teachings of Christ nor the will of Christ. True Christians look to Christ and not to an imposter. As this world unites in praise of Pope John Paul II, let’s remember the words of Him whom this world crucified: “*Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! For so did their fathers to the false prophets.*”