

Open Windows

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justice, Pope Paul made himself the mouthpiece of the voiceless millions trapped in poverty, disease and ignorance.

In his landmark encyclical "Populorum Progressio," of March 1967, he blamed both laissez-faire capitalism and atheistic Communist materialism for many of the world's social ills.

"The poor nations remain poor while the rich ones become still richer," he wrote. "The very life of poor nations, civil peace in developing countries, and world peace itself are at stake. We must make haste. Too many are suffering."

The pope who reigned during the most turbulent period in the modern history of the Church all but missed his cue to enter the world's stage.

He was "almost not born alive," says biographer Alden Hatch. His tiny mother had a very difficult time. For anxious hours, bother and child hung between life and death.

Weakened by the ordeal and incapable of nursing her frail new baby, his mother gave him over to the care of a wet-nurse in a neighboring village. He was not considered well enough to return permanently to his family home until he was almost two years old. He was nagged by poor health during most of his boyhood and youth.

Giovanni Battista Enrico Antonio Maria Montini, as he was christened, was born on Sept. 26, 1897, in his family's country villa at Concesio, near the Lombardy city of Brescia in the foothills of the Italian Alps.

The second of the three children, all boys, of Giorgio Montini and Giuditta Alghisi — well-to-do, upper middle-class people — he was baptized on Sept. 30 in the baroque Concesio village church of San Antonio.

His father was a journalist and a member of the pre-Fascist Italian Parliament, deeply involved in the defense of the Church against anticlericals and socialists and in championing the newly founded Christian Social Movement — the forerunner of the Christian Democratic parties in Italy and other European countries.

The bookish young "Giambattista," as his family called him, whose frail health kept him from residing in the seminary during his studies for the priesthood, was ordained in Brescia on May 29, 1920, and sent to Rome for further study.

In June 1922 — when Cardinal Achille Ratti was crowned Pope Pius XI and Benito Mussolini established his Fascist dictatorship — Don Battista was tapped for the Vatican's Foreign service and appointed to the Pontifical Academy of Noble Ecclesiastics (now called the Ecclesiastical Academy), the Church's elite training school for diplomats.

After a brief spell in Warsaw, Poland, he returned to the Eternal City, where for the next 30 years (1924-1954) he served in the Vatican Secretariat of State while also acting as chaplain for a time to the Federation of Italian Catholic University Students — work that brought him into a few rowdy encounters with Fascist bully-boys.

Pope Pius XI died on Feb. 10, 1939. Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli became Pope Pius XII on March 2, and in September of that same year, Hitler and Stalin, allied in a non-aggression pact, invaded Poland and launched World War II. Mussolini declared war on France on June 10, 1940, and Vatican City State became a tiny island of neutrality surrounded by the territory of the belligerent.

During the war years, in addition to his duties in the Secretariat of State and as private secretary to Pope Pius, Msgr. Montini was entrusted with the over-all direction of the Vatican's vast, complex war relief efforts.

In the aftermath of the war, Msgr. Montini — as close associate of Pope Pius XII — was influential in bringing strong moral Vatican support to Europe's Christian Democratic parties, in helping to mobilize action against Communists at the polls in Italy in 1948, and in fostering the priest-worker movement in France.

In 1954, in a move that some have interpreted as all but sealing the destiny of the future Pope Paul VI, Pius XII appointed his friend and aide as Archbishop of Milan, Italy's most populous see — the most important see from which the papacy has been drawn in the past.

Pope Pius XII died on Oct. 9, 1958, and was succeeded by Pope John XXIII, who made Archbishop Montini a cardinal on Dec. 15, 1958.

In eight and a half years in Milan, Archbishop Montini conducted a two-year visitation of the 1,000 churches in the archdiocese, built or renovated some 200 churches and chapels, set up a modern system of social services, founded a newspaper, and gave striking evidence of constant concern with the problems and the Church-alienated workers in the Communist-affected region of northern Italy.

On the death of Pope John, June 3, 1963, Cardinal Montini was considered by many as a likely successor. Pope John had lighted a fire of future Church reform by summoning the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, and Cardinal Montini had often echoed in talks and writings many of the various ideas advanced by Pope John.

Cardinal Montini was elected pope on June 21, 1963, on either the fifth or sixth ballot cast by the 80 cardinals in the 79th and — until then — largest conclave of cardinals in the history of the Church.



With Cardinal Terence Cooke.

**The Polly-O Family Wishes
to Express its Deepest
Sympathy to the Catholic
Community in the
Rochester Diocese on the
Passing of Pope Paul VI
a Man Who Worked for
World Peace.
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