

Pope should uphold freedom within church

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

A century is a long time. One hundred years. Very few of us can expect to live that long. Those who do may at least look forward to honorable mention by Willard Scott on the "Today Show."

The 20th century of the Christian Era will be remembered for many things: two world wars, a worldwide depression, the harnessing of nuclear energy, extraordinary advances in medicine, transportation, and communications, the women's movement, Vatican II, and on and on.

But it is difficult to think of any series of developments more astonishing than the emergence, accelerated growth, and almost spontaneous disintegration of communism.

When the human community looks back over these past 100 years, it is likely to mark 1989 as the most momentous year in a truly momentous century.

Poland, Hungary, the Baltic States of the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria — after decades of communist domination — the struggle for freedom

burst suddenly and powerfully to the surface.

Only in China did it meet temporary failure. Only in China was there a repressive government still powerful enough to quash a fledgling democratic movement with brutal, deadly force.

How did all this happen? Where did it all begin?

There are no simple answers. The circumstances are prolonged and complex.

Nevertheless, it is possible to point to some obvious explanatory factors, and to one in particular: the election in 1978 of



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the first Slavic pope in the history of the church, Karol Wojtyla, then Cardinal-Archbishop of Cracow.

If it was the Solidarity movement in Poland — under the leadership of Lech Wasles — that first successfully challenged the communist hegemony in Eastern Europe, it was the newly elected pope who provided the spiritual guidance and support.

Pope John Paul II can truly be described, as James Carroll so described him in a recent *New York Times* op-ed piece December 1, as the "spiritual godfather" of the movement that has led to the breakup of monolithic communism.

But, in Carroll's view, there is a peculiar "poignancy for Roman Catholics in knowing that the man who helped open the door to democracy in the East is also the man who slammed shut the window of renewal that Pope John XXIII opened in 1962."

As the communist world now grudgingly abandons its corrupt practices of banning literature, blacklisting writers, punishing dissidents, silencing critics, installing hard-liners in key positions of power, the Catholic Church still employs them.

Indeed, John Paul II proved to be so galvanizing a source of inspiration for Solidarity during those early months of his pontificate that he was perceived as a serious threat to the stability of the Warsaw Pact itself.

Consequently, in 1981 he seems to have been targeted for assassination by the Soviets, working through their Bulgarian agents.

Looking back now over the stunning and breathtaking events of 1989, one must give credit, therefore, where credit is due.

As we head into the final decade of this remarkable 20th century, may the "spiritual godfather" of the Solidarity movement galvanize the church in the same cause of freedom and human rights. His first name, after all, is John.

Evil King Herod wreaks havoc in search for the infant Messiah

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

"Has Claudius returned yet?" King Herod snapped impatiently at the servant who waited on him.

"No, your Majesty," he said, "as you have requested, Claudius will be sent in to see you as soon as he arrives."

"Something is wrong! He should have been here days ago!" the king shouted. "What is taking so long?"

This time the servant did not answer, but instead went quietly about his duties. He had learned long ago that when King Herod was in such a state, it was best not to say anything. Sometimes it could be days before Herod's rage was spent.

That same day in Bethlehem, Gaspar, Melchior and Balthasar were preparing to return to their homeland.

"The boy was even more beautiful than I ever could have imagined," Melchior said. "I was correct in bringing him gold. He will be a king of great virtue."

"A divine king; that is why I chose frankincense," Gaspar said. "I do not, however, understand why Balthasar gave the gift of myrrh. I do not doubt that it is a

precious perfume. But it does not seem right to give a baby something which is used as an anointing oil for the dead."

"I selected my gift for the child with good reason," Balthasar said, overhearing the comments of his companions. "Sadly this child is destined for much suffering and death at the hands of others. It shall not happen until later in his life. Come, now, we must leave at once. I had a very odd dream last night."

Because of the urging of Balthasar, the three kings did not return to their homes through Jerusalem. Balthasar had been warned in his dream to have nothing more to do with King Herod.

They were well on their way home before Claudius arrived back at King Herod's palace.

"Well, where are they?" King Herod asked him.

"Unfortunately, they were seen leaving Bethlehem before I could stop them," answered Claudius.

"I knew that I should not have trusted them!" Herod yelled. "Did they find the boy they claim to be king of the Jews?"

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"I suppose that they did," Claudius said.

"You suppose? Where is the baby? Surely you will not insult me by not having this information!"

Claudius hesitated. "Your Majesty, with all due respect, this child is a baby boy among many others. Where should I look for him?"

"It is a simple task, Claudius," Herod said, smiling. "When did the kings say they first saw his star rising in the sky?"

"Nearly two years ago."

"Then you are to return to Bethlehem immediately," Herod said. "Collect all of the male children two years of age and under."

"And when I have done so?" Claudius asked.

"Kill them all! Do not spare anyone! I am the king of the Jews!" Herod shouted.

A short time later, a great wail of anguish went up from Bethlehem like a raging fire. It was impossible to ever extinguish the grief of the mothers who had lost their children so senselessly.

Scripture reference: Matthew 2:9-18. The children who were murdered by King Herod are remembered every year on the Feast of the Holy Innocents.

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