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Pope John Paul II in '94: Man who went against grain

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — For Pope John Paul II and the Vatican, 1994 was a remarkable year that saw a visibly aging pontiff return as a dominant figure on the international scene.

Through sharp social criticism and bold church appointments, in documents and his own best-selling book, the 74-year-old pope had such an impact on world events that he was named Man of the Year by *Time* magazine.

For many in the church, the pope has earned the title many times over.

During the last 12 months, he has alternately thundered, cajoled and pleaded on pivotal issues involving the family, marriage and human life. In a sense, he was fashioning his own moral crusade during the International Year of the Family.

Almost single-handedly he whipped up opposition to a draft U.N. plan for population and development, convincing participants at an international conference in Cairo, Egypt, to reword the text and publicly reject abortion as a method of birth control.

When the European Parliament encouraged states to recognize marital and family rights for homosexual unions, the pope stood up in his "pulpit" — his apartment window in St. Peter's Square — and declared in outrage: "A true family is not constituted by a tie between two men or two women ... Who benefits from this propaganda?"

He never lost an opportunity to condemn abortion and its legalization — to lawmakers, church activists and political leaders like President Clinton, whom he met in June. In February, in a letter to the world's families, he warned that society was becoming a "civilization of use" in which human life was considered disposable.

All the while he was working on what sources predicted would be one of the most high-impact encyclicals of his pontificate: on threats to human life.

The pontiff did not hesitate to defend even less-popular church positions on marriage and sexuality. In a series of talks, he stated bluntly that sex outside of marriage was wrong, but rejected the idea that the church wants to make sex "taboo." He called divorce a plague and said it represented one of the greatest defeats of civilization.

All this was enough to make 1994 a vintage year for a countercultural pope. But life and family issues were only the most visible level of papal activity; he showed creative leadership in several other decisions and events.

He took a risk, for example, in cooperating in a book interview aimed at a mass audience: Previous papal tomes on theological and philosophical subjects were tough reading even for experts. But the more informal and personal style of "Crossing the Threshold of



Hope" has made it one of the hottest-selling books in the world.

There were disappointments for the pope in 1994, too. The fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina prompted a string of conscience-shaking appeals from the pope, but to no avail. He was bitterly upset when he had to cancel a planned trip to Sarajevo, the besieged Bosnian capital, because of security risks.

It was a year of two synods — on Africa and on religious life — which saw hundreds of participants convened in Rome for a month of pulse-taking and direction-setting. It was a year of 30 new cardinals, the largest batch ever named by a pope, including prelates in Vietnam, Cuba and Bosnia.

It was a year of diplomatic groundbreaking, with the Holy See establishing official relations with Israel, Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

It was a year of papal documents, short and long. Six pages in May said a loud and "definitive" no to women priests. Seventy pages in November outlined an amazingly ambitious church program of preparation for the year 2000, including papal trips, major ecumenical initiatives and regional synods.

Not all of what the pope did and said was pleasing to contemporary society. Not everything was unanimously welcomed within his own church. But that's another thing 1994 proved about the pope: Going against the current seems to make him stand out in greater relief.

Accused clinic killer had a disruptive past

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The man accused of killing two abortion clinic employees in Massachusetts and shooting at a Norfolk, Va., clinic has strong ties to the Catholic Church but disrupted Christmas Eve Mass at the church he attended with his parents.

On Jan. 3, John C. Salvi III, a 22-year-old hairdresser trainee, was ordered held without bail pending further court appearances on charges that he shot at the Norfolk clinic Dec. 31. He was arrested three blocks from the Hillcrest Clinic shortly after the building was sprayed with bullets.

Salvi was denied bail by Virginia State Court Judge Reid Spencer. Salvi is charged in Massachusetts with killing the receptionists from two clinics in Brookline, Mass., just outside Boston, and wounding five others in Dec. 30 attacks. The states were reported to be negotiating his extradition.

Wire services reported that during a Christmas Eve Mass at St. Elizabeth's Church in Seabrook, N.H., Salvi stood up in front of the congregation and spoke out against Catholicism, saying the church exploited people and wasn't doing what it should. A state trooper in

the congregation escorted Salvi out.

"He wanted to go back in and have his say again," said Colon Forbes. "I said, 'You've had your say. Those people don't want to listen to you.'"

The pastor of a church in Everett, Mass., where Salvi lived in 1993, said the young man had complained that the church didn't do enough to fight abortion and wanted the parish to distribute pictures of aborted fetuses.

Father Edmund Sviokla, pastor of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Everett, said that when he rejected the idea, Salvi passed out such materials himself from his pickup parked outside the church.

Other acquaintances said Salvi and his parents argued over his behavior and career choice when they visited him at his Hampton, N.H., apartment for Christmas. His parents live in Florida and had returned to their home the day before he is alleged to have opened fire on the Brookline clinics.

The *Boston Globe* said Salvi had attended a meeting of Massachusetts Citizens for Life in February and handed out photographs, but that he wasn't known for joining pro-life activities in the area.



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