

Tribute to Pope Paul

Immortal Pope dies as an ordinary mortal: A Tribute to a Great Man

-Ajoy Roy

The immortal Pope John Paul II met his death like an ordinary mortal on Saturday evening 7-30 p.m., April 2, 2005 according to local Italian time as he passed away because of heart and kidney failure. He was in comma for last few days being sustained with artificial life supporting system. This time when he fell ill he refused to go to hospital and decided to meet death in his Vatican palace. Not only millions of followers of Catholic Church, but also all peace loving common people prayed for his recovery. But the inevitable had happened. At 9.37 p.m. Italian time the bells of Saint Peter's Basilica knoll indicating the end of present Pope's life of 84 years (1920-2005). The lakhs of people assembled in Saint Peter's Square who were praying for his salvation with lighting candles stood up in silence with tears rolling down their cheeks to receive the sad news. The pale faced, grief stricken Archbishop Leonardo Sanondri announced with deep throated voice,

“Our Pure Soul Pope John has returned to Great Almighty God.”

In him, the world lost a most peace loving human being for the last few decades, a staunch supporter of human rights in his own way and belief, and champion of upholding the cause of common folk throughout the world. He was not only a religious leader of catholic belief, but also his love for common people cuts across the religious, ethnic, geographical and state barriers. He was one of the most lovable and colourful personalities of our time. One may not agree, or even vehemently criticize his conservative stand on women rights and women emancipation, women's right of abortion, birth control etc. But there is no question of his sincerity of when he, according to his own faith and way, had been relentlessly trying to establish peace and harmony among the variegated and conflicting world community, social justice, rights of women, family – according to the teachings of holy Bible. He would never listen to so called system of homosexual marriage and to the demand of appointing women priest. We may not agree with his philosophy, faith and methodology, but we must not question his noble intention, kindness and wish. His kindness and softness towards children and poor is simply phenomenal and infinite.

A most widely traveled person, not less than 120 countries including Bangladesh and India, John Paul was all along a staunch fighter against all forms of war, and particularly deadly against the US aggression of Iraq. Before he became Pope, as Bishop Carol Joseph Yojtela of Poland he joined the secret nationalist movement aiming to liberate Poland first from Nazism of Hitler, and then during post war time, Soviet-East European yolk. In that sense Joseph was loveably termed as a freedom fighter by his countrymen.

He was elected Pope on 16th October 1978, the first non Italian to become the pope in Vatican's history of 455 years. His regime as a pope is the longest one in Church's history.

I admire the late Pope for his love for modern science, and tried his best to bring science research and theology of bible faith in mutual respectful healthy platform. He categorically deplored and expressed his deep sorrow for Church's stand against scientific development and scientists more precisely 'stand against Galileo and Bruno by 17th Century Roman Church.' I admire his courage against many of his orthodox colleagues to pronounce a general apology from the Church committing excesses against some persons and institutions being adopted in March 2000 (after some revision) :

“A ROMAN CATHOLIC APOLOGY FOR THE PAST SINS OF ITS MEMBERS”

The essence of this declaration on behalf of the Church may be stated in the following words:

“In an apparent reference to the treatment of individuals that the church considered heretics, to the various schisms within Christianity, and for manifestation of religious intolerance, the Pope said, “We are asking pardon for the divisions among Christians, for the use of violence that some have committed in the service of truth and for attitudes of mistrust and hostility assumed towards followers of other religions.”

Towards Science, the Pope had the following attitude:

“The search for truth is the task of basic science. ...

Basic research must be free with regard to the political and economic authorities. , which must cooperate in its development without hampering in its creativity or harnessing it to serve their own purposes. Like any other truth, scientific truth is, in fact answerable only to itself and to the supreme Truth, God, the Creator of man and of all things. The atheists may not agree with the last part of the sentence- God being treated as 'supreme Truth'. But this does not belittle the spirit of what Pope said.”

As regards relation between science and religion, the Pope did not see that these two were poles apart. In fact he sought union between the faith and scientific pursuit. He once said,

“The collaboration between religion and modern science is to the advantage of both, without violating their respective autonomy in any way. Just as religion demands religious freedom, so science rightly claims freedom of research.”

As regards Galileo-affairs Pope had the following observations:

“The greatness of Galileo is known to everyone, like that of Einstein; but unlike the later. Whom we are honoring today before the College of Cardinals in the apostolic palace, the former had to suffer a great deal – we cannot conceal the fact- at the hands of men and

organizations of the Church.” (*Deep Harmony which Unites the Truths of Science with the Truths of Faith*’- Speech delivered by Pope John Paul II on the occasion of commemoration of birth of Albert Einstein- the ceremony organized by Pontifical Academy of Sciences on November 10, 1979)

Visit of Bangladesh: A Personal Remembrance

The great pope visited Bangladesh in the year 1986. In a civic reception held at the premises of Catholic Church, Kakrail, Dhaka, he addressed the public, religious leaders of all important religions practiced in Bangladesh, and elite of the society. Fortunately for me I was also invited to be there, and had the life-time great opportunity of seeing him from a close quarter and listening his grand speech of peace and humanity- love for all and malice to none (his theme of speech). Whole audience applauded him with standing ovation as he ended his speech praying for the salvation of poor and common men and women.

During his stay in Dhaka he once out of curiosity he rode on a cycle rickshaw and enjoyed it. But seeing the labor of the puller he felt sad for him. He bought the rickshaw for the puller, it is learnt.

On 15th May, the grand Pope addressed the Bishops of Bangladesh in a special meeting, when a team of Bengali Bishops from Bangladesh visited Vatican City to pay homage to the Pope. Please see attached file.

Dhaka

4th April 2005