



Paul Kengor, *A Pope and a President: John Paul II, Ronald Reagan, and the Extraordinary Untold Story of the 20th Century*. ISI Books, 2017.

I had thought for some time that the definitive book about the collaboration between Pope John Paul II and President Ronald Reagan to bring about the collapse of European communism in the 1980s had yet to be written. Paul Kengor, the eminent scholar of Reagan who heads the Center for Vision and Values at Grove City College and sits on the Society of Catholic Social Scientists Board of Advisors, has now done that. Kengor is to be lauded for his accomplishment and ISI Books commended for bringing into print this excellent work of scholarship.

Kengor, to be sure, provides in detail—the fruit of intensive, breathtaking research—the specifics of the decade-long collaboration between the world’s main religious and political leaders to bring about the most significant development in international affairs since the end of World War II. The book also gives extensive background information about the rise and advance of communism in Europe; the often brutal repression of religion and the Church and of whole populations by Communist regimes; the earlier life and crucial formation of these two men and how it prepared them for the great mission God ordained for them; the rise of the Solidarity movement in Poland after John Paul’s epochal 1979 visit there and how it served as the linchpin of the unraveling of the Soviet Bloc; the close bond forged between the two men who in many ways shared strikingly similar backgrounds even to the point of both surviving the bullets of would-be assassins; the role of Mikhail Gorbachev in the unraveling of the USSR and the importance of both Reagan’s and John Paul’s dealings with him; and the connection of Fatima with the world-changing developments of the 1980s. Kengor discusses in detail the attempted assassination of John Paul in 1981, showing without a doubt that the Soviets were behind it.

Kengor presents many facts that were either not widely known or perhaps not known at all before his book. These include: that Reagan apparently had mystical experiences in his life, such as when he heard his father Jack’s voice after the latter’s death consoling him that—despite Jack’s shortcomings—he was in a happy place, and also how he seems to have seen angels after the assassination attempt; how the professional bureaucrats in the U.S. intelligence community spurned the notion that the Soviets could somehow have been behind the attempted assassination of John Paul (Kengor strikingly says on page 313 that it “was rarely distrustful of Moscow”); how, among other things, the intelligence bureaucrats

tried to discredit the research of Claire Sterling, who probably first established the Soviet connection to the assassination attempt (all this about the intelligence community has a pertinence for our day as we now hear about the machinations of the “Deep State”); how John Paul’s would-be assassin, Mehmet Ali Agca, had previously been set to assassinate Solidarity leader Lech Walesa when he visited John Paul in Rome until the authorities learned of the plan; how the Soviets may have been deterred from an invasion of Poland by the assassination attempt on Reagan only a couple of months after he took office and especially by the tough statements made by his Secretary of State Alexander Haig right after the attempt, which were so criticized in the media at the time; how on her visit to the White House in June 1981 Mother Teresa of Calcutta told Reagan that with the assassination attempt on him he had suffered the passion of the cross and that it had meaning because the country and the world needed him; the likely Soviet connection to the brutal murder of the Solidarity chaplain, Fr. Jerzy Popieluszko, who is now beatified; how two of the most prominent Catholics in Reagan’s administration, CIA Director William Casey (who had an ongoing tussle with the professional bureaucrats under him) and Judge William Clark would “play the most crucial roles” with Reagan in his administration’s “attempt to take down the Soviet empire” (314); how John Paul and Reagan discussed Fatima during their meetings; how Reagan vigorously went to bat for Poland after the declaration of martial law in December 1981 and how this has led to his continued great popularity among the Poles; how Gorbachev, whose mother was a Christian and who secretly had him baptized as an infant (and who Reagan speculated was a closet Christian), was reported to have wondered if he had not been given the mission by God to end the atheist, Communist Soviet Union; and on and on.

Besides the frequent discussion of Fatima—including even noting its importance for Moslems, as Mohammed’s favorite daughter bore that name, and mentioning that the late Bishop Fulton Sheen thought that the fact that the Virgin Mary appeared at Fatima signals that one day they would come to her Son—Kengor mentions the importance of December 8, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, in his whole inquiry. It was pertinent at different ends of the twentieth century. Reagan’s parents were married in 1904 at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Fulton, Illinois. That marriage, of course, made possible the life of one of the two men at the pivot of the defeat of atheistic communism. Then, late in his presidency, on December 8, 1987, Reagan signed the INF Treaty with the Soviets, which culminated his peacemaking efforts—the second significant achievement, along with the defeat of communism, on which John

Paul II collaborated with him. It was also on December 8, 1991, that the Cold War's end was sealed as the agreement was signed by the leaders of the Soviet republics establishing the Commonwealth of Independent States and dissolving the USSR.

Also, throughout the book, Kengor highlights how the lives of John Paul II and Reagan show the will of God unfolding—they are his instruments in the unfolding of this epochal battle against the great worldwide evil of communism in the twentieth century. Kengor repeatedly calls it the “DP,” Divine Plan. After reading this book, one is struck by the reality of the intersection of the sacred and the secular in the movement of history. One sees it as evidently, if not as vividly, as in the Old Testament. This indeed is the especially great achievement of this book: It provides not just history as we usually think of it, but what one might call *complete* history, seeing the full dimension of human affairs against the background of supernatural reality. This readily recalls the thought of the great Catholic social scientist Msgr. Paul Hanly Furfey, who stressed what he called “supernatural sociology,” which realizes that the battle between good and evil on earth is part of a cosmic battle between the supernatural forces of good and evil. As Furfey put it, to beat back the supernatural satanic forces that are behind social problems, man has to seek supernatural help. Kengor makes it abundantly evident that this was what at bottom was the nature of the struggle between the West and Christianity on the one side and communism on the other. The supernatural help in this struggle was what the Blessed Virgin Mary offered at Fatima.

By the way, it's because of outstanding achievements like this book—to say nothing of his massive scholarly work before it—that the SCSS honored Kengor in 2018 with its Pope Pius XI Award for Contributions toward the Building Up of a True Catholic Social Science.

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Stephen M. Krason, *Catholicism and American Political Ideologies: Catholic Social Teaching, Liberalism, and Conservatism*. Hamilton Books, 2017.

“Love justice, you that are the judges of the earth” (Wisdom 1:1). In modern liberal democracies, where the people are ultimately responsible for the design and operation of government, this divine admonition bears as