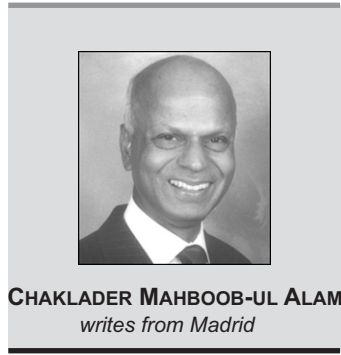


# The Pope as a universal priest and a world leader



CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM writes from Madrid

CARDINAL Joseph Ratzinger, the head of Roman Catholic Church's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (the old Inquisition) has just been elected as the 265th pope, who is widely considered as the leader of the most conservative group of cardinals. He will have a formidable task ahead of him. Whatever he does, he will inevitably be compared with his immediate predecessor who became a world leader of great stature during his long reign of nearly 27 years. The new pope has neither the charisma nor the popularity of media-savvy John Paul II, who travelled all over the world charming his followers with his words and gestures.

On October 16, 1978, a virtually unknown (outside his home country and the Vatican) Polish cardinal called Karol (Charles) Jozef Wotyla was elected as the 264th pope, on the eighth ballot as a compromise candidate. No one then could imagine that almost 27 years later, on his death, an estimated three million people from all over the world, more than two hundred heads of state and government, church leaders of all denominations and other religious leaders would flock to Rome to pay homage to him. Karol Wotyla's life was like a fairy tale story. He was born in a poor mixed Polish-Lithuanian (Polish father and Lithuanian mother) family. As a young man he had to work as a labourer in a stone quarry and later as a worker in a factory to make ends meet. The factory job not only provided an

income to young Karol but also saved him from being deported to a forced labour camp by the German occupiers of his country. Since he was a good student and a deeply religious person, he also used this time to study for the priesthood in a clandestine manner. In 1946, at the age of 26, he was ordained a priest. Thus started a life of extraordinary intellectual, religious and literary achievements, which culminated in his becoming the pope of the Roman Catholic Church.

There is no doubt that Pope John Paul II was a great man and I join the millions across the world in mourn-

kingdom of Italy, his temporal powers have been limited to a small city-state called the Vatican (approximately 3000 subjects), which is located within the city of Rome. During the reign of John Paul II, the pope's role in world affairs increased many folds, because he knew how to use his position as the spiritual head of more than a thousand million Roman Catholics living in all five continents of the world. He was the first pope, who knew how to use the media to spread his universal message. He literally turned the Vatican into an effective media machine.

historians think that he entrusted all twelve of them equally with the task of spreading Christianity. Historians also tend to agree that the Roman Church was not founded by Peter and that he was not Rome's first bishop. However, what is accepted as a historical fact is that both Peter and Paul reached martyrdom in Rome. Even today no one knows exactly where Peter was buried. But the most important reality (not a myth) which helped the bishop of Rome to claim supremacy over others was the fact that he was the bishop of the capital of the Roman empire and therefore an important part of the most powerful temporal authority of the then world.

The term pope is derived from the Greek word pappas, which means father. In the olden days, all the bishops in Asia and Europe were called popes. Unlike the current electoral system under which the Roman pope is elected in a conclave by eligible cardinals in secret ballots, the popes in ancient times used to be elected by the clergy and the people in open elections which often used to turn violent. To give support to the Roman bishop's claim as the head of all the bishops of Christian Church, he took on the old pagan title of Summus Pontifex, who, in effect, was the head of all Roman priests and exercised enormous power in pagan Rome. If one has to identify one single factor responsible for the rapid spread of Christianity in Europe and subsequent transformation of Christianity into a dominant Western religion despite its birth in Jerusalem, in my opinion, Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity in 312AD should be identified as that factor. So great was his indirect contribution to the spread of Christianity that he was popularly known as the thirteenth apostle. A little later, Constantine transferred the capital of the empire to Constantinople thus reducing the civil authority of Rome. This move in a strange manner, instead of reducing the position of the Roman pope, increased his powers. He started claiming the old imperial title of Pontifex Maximus (the supreme priest).

The rise of Islam in the seventh century and its rapid expansion in territories, where Christianity was the principal force until then also indirectly consolidated Rome's position in the Christian world. In Asia, all the three "patriarchates" of early Christianity -- Jerusalem, Alexandria and Antioch -- (who had their own patriarchs or popes), became part of the quickly expanding Islamic empire. After the collapse of the Western Roman empire, the bishop of Rome even adopted the imperial colours -- white and red -- as symbols of Roman supremacy over other churches. Although the Roman empire disappeared many centuries ago, the Roman Church has survived to our day as successor to Rome's imperial past, hence so much pomp and pageantry at the Vatican. During the middle ages and even later, the popes intervened so actively in political, financial and military affairs that it seemed that they had abandoned the concept of papal leadership of the Christians as their spiritual leader and had opted for papal monarchy. Rapid spread of Roman Catholicism in the Americas, Asia, Africa and Australia because of European colonialism during the last five hundred years led to a significant increase in the total number of Catholics. Today, there are more Roman Catholics in the world than all other Christians combined. This has further strengthened the position of the pope as the head of the world's best organised religion.

Roman Catholicism, unlike any other religion in the world, has got a highly centralised power structure with a well-established hierarchy and a clear chain of command. The Pope is the maximum authority of the church and his ambassadors represent him in most capitals of the world. Under his central authority, there are bishops (who enjoy considerable local autonomy), congregations, religious orders and societies and local parishes in every Catholic community in the world, who act on his behalf. Although the pope is the visible head of the Catholic Church, he like Peter acts on behalf of Jesus, who, according to Christian tradition, was the son of God. Thus the pope, in effect, acts on behalf of God. This is the theological foundation of the Roman Catholic Church's claim to supremacy over other churches.

As mentioned before, the loss of all papal states except the area known as the Vatican to the new kingdom of Italy substantially reduced the pope's temporal powers. But in a way it increased the pope's desire to expand his sphere of influence as the absolute spiritual and moral leader of the Christendom. Pope John Paul II knew how to reach out to the young and the old. He was also successful in enlarging the scope of his pronouncements to every sphere of human activity -- political, economic, moral, religious etc. He felt that the world was his parish and he was its priest. Curiously most of the world leaders listened to him with respect, even though they very often did not pay heed to what he said. Will the world treat the new pope in the same manner?

## LETTER FROM EUROPE

**Pope John Paul II knew how to reach out to the young and the old. He was also successful in enlarging the scope of his pronouncements to every sphere of human activity, -- political, economic, moral, religious etc. He felt that the world was his parish and he was its priest. Curiously most of the world leaders listened to him with respect, even though they very often did not pay heed to what he said. Will the world treat the new pope in the same manner?**

ing his death. But seeing all the pomp and pageantry of the ceremony, the rituals, the trappings of power, the show of earthly wealth around the Vatican and the comings and goings of kings, presidents and prime ministers, one may wonder whether the pope was a spiritual leader, a temporal ruler or both at the same time. One may also wonder how Christianity, which was born in Asia, has come to be perceived essentially as a Western religion.

The pope has a dual role--he is both an absolute (judicial, legislative and executive) monarch and a spiritual leader of the Roman Catholics at the same time. Since the reunification of Italy in the nineteenth century and the subsequent loss of papal states to the new

True, the popes had always claimed that they had a special mission and that the papacy had universal jurisdiction. The Vatican's claim to supremacy over all other Christian churches is based on the theory of Petrine primacy. This theory is founded on several carefully constructed myths -- that Peter was the Prince of the apostles, that Peter founded the Roman Church, that he was Rome's first Pope and that according to the wishes of Jesus, Petrine primacy would pass in perpetuity to his successors, whose pronouncements would, as a consequence, be considered as infallible. The reality was quite different. There is considerable controversy over the claim that Jesus nominated any of the apostles as their prince or leader. Many

# Disaster and health hazard

DR. MUSTAFA ABDUR RAHIM

BOTH environmental pollution and natural disasters are spiraling. Environmental pollution is one major reason for increasing natural disasters and together they result in major disasters like flood, drought, tidal surge, and tsunami, that are ravaging the world. The immediate victims of these disasters die instantly while the survivors face looming slow death. Most of the dead bodies decompose in open and spread germs. Disaster and health are inseparably related.

Anything that disrupts natural state of affairs is a disaster. Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) defines disaster as a sudden or gradually occurring event triggered by human action or by natural causes. UNDR considers an event as a disaster, which occurs in a certain place and time, putting the community in serious danger and destroying the social infrastructure. Generally, we understand disaster as a natural or human-induced event that deeply disrupts life and normal social environment and inflicts great loss of life and property. Disaster can be of two types: natural disaster and human induced.

Natural disasters include tornado, cyclone, flood, earthquake, tidal surge, tsunami, drought, epidemic, volcanic eruption, arsenic contamination, cold wave, conflagration, etc.

Human induced disasters could be war, famine, food-crisis, political turmoil, border conflict, displacement, industrial/technological accident, nuclear, chemical and gas contamination, environmental degradation, fire, terrorism, etc.

Geographic location and climatic conditions have made natural disasters common in Bangladesh. Tornado, flood, drought, and river erosion are taking place every now and then. Besides, Bangladesh suffers occasional earthquakes, being within the earthquake zone. The massive earthquake of 1897 is still an active memory. Such earthquakes change the topography. Geologists and historians are of the opinion that the present course of the Brahmaputra River and the highlands of Modhupur Gor are effects of such earthquakes. A moderate earthquake shook Chittagong and adjoining areas in 1997. During July-August 1999, Moheshkhali and adjacent areas suffered four jolts. These tremors caused both human and material losses.

Complete elimination or prevention of natural disasters is beyond human abilities. However, preparedness, including awareness would substantially reduce the impact of disasters. The old belief that collecting and distributing relief material to the victims after the disaster is only possible action has changed. The present concept of disaster management emphasizes preparedness before the disaster and rehabilitation -- not just relief -- after the disaster. Bangladesh has adopted the same principles and changed the Ministry of Disaster Management, Relief and Rehabilitation.

The government, in cooperation with UNDP and UNICEF, has established the Bureau of Disaster Management to build mass disaster awareness. As it is not possible for any individual, department, ministry, or organization to tackle a disaster single-handedly, the government has formed the National Disaster Management Council combining all relevant ministries, departments, and organizations, including the representatives of NGOs. The council is the highest body on disaster management and the Prime Minister chairs the council. Moreover, the disaster management committee chaired by the minister for DMR is responsible for implementation of the government's national policies. District, upazila, and union disaster management committees chaired by the deputy commissioner, upazila nirbahi officer, and the chairman respectively are active in the field level. The MoDMRR formulated and published a standing order for disaster management.

Disaster and the health are closely interrelated. Disasters affect the health systems most. One hundred and thirty-four countries adopted the Alma Ata declaration: "Health for all by the year 2000" in 1978. The declaration perhaps materialized in developed countries, but in our country it is yet to materialize. According to WHO: "Health is a state of physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." In our country, we give more emphasis on primary health care because a notable number of people in our country are illiterate and unaware. Illiteracy and unawareness breed misconception.

Science has developed a lot, yet, in the 21st century, amidst scientific progress, people in our country still practice quack medication. Nonetheless, people nowadays are somewhat conscious about health. Literate and illiterate people are equally active to vaccinate infants against the six deadly diseases. Besides, managing family size and thereby improving mother and child health status is becoming common. Health service providers from both public and private sectors are extending all out support in this

regard.

Now is the time to think about the post-disaster situation. More than two lakhs people died in seven countries on December 26, 2004 due to tsunami catastrophe. Lakhs of people were injured, millions of dollars of property was destroyed. Indonesia is the worst affected among the seven countries. The total climatic condition of Indonesia is said to have changed. Several days passed before the cadavers could be found and removed, causing severe pestilence. Rescue workers from all over the world rushed to Indonesia to help the victims. The loss cost by quake is severe. If any moderate scale quake takes place in our

taking preventive measures. For example, we can avoid loss of life and property from earthquake if we follow the national building code. On the other hand, to minimize disaster we have to create mass awareness. Disaster Management Bureau is primarily engaged in mass awareness campaign to reduce losses from cyclone, tidal surge, flood, and drought. Gradually the bureau is addressing other disasters such as arsenic contamination. Recently the bureau organized the second national seminar on earthquake. Experts from Nepal and India participated in the seminar together with the Bangladeshi experts and administrators. It has also undertaken training schemes for earthquake.

following afterwards.

The Acting-Principal of the Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defense Training Complex at Mirpur, Mr. M. A. Salam, informed that lately, for the first time, five graduation courses of international standard were conducted in Bangladesh. Seventeen fire-fighters successfully completed these internationally accepted courses. Experts from India, Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines, and the US were the trainers and instructors for the courses. The course titles were: Medical First Responder (MFR) and Collapsed Structure Search and Rescue (CSSR). The successful graduates are qualified to conduct the training all over the country. Cooperation from government, private organizations, and generous individuals will foster the process.

Bangladesh abounds with curious people. Curious people always crowd accident-scene and often hamper the activities of the service providers. Fire service or such other agencies face great difficulty in managing the crowd. Presence of TV camera leads the people to compete for appearance on the camera. Of course, there are exceptions. Few days back, when the WASA bhavan caught fire, one rickshaw puller Mostofa set a rare example of bravery. If we all can demonstrate such serving mentality, rescuing the victims from accidents would become easier. Meanwhile, a tornado struck Rangpur and Gaibandha killing and injuring people. The injured were in precarious condition. Food, water, medicine, treatment, nursing -- everything was in short supply. Now is the time to prepare for the present and impending disasters.

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country thousands will die, loss of wealth will be in the crores. Most of the buildings of Bangladesh are 2 to 5 storied and most of them are constructed without complying with the rules and regulations of building code. A 9.0 force tremor would destroy 63 percent of houses in Dhaka. On the other hand, flood and drought are regular happenings. Flood devastates houses and croplands. Diarrhoea, dysentery, jaundice, influenza, and skin diseases are prevalent in post-flood period.

From the very beginning of human life, people are facing flood, drought, torrential rainfall, earthquake, frostbite, and volcanic eruption. Nobody has control over these menaces. However, in some cases we can minimize the loss by

Most recently, ADPC and BRAC organized training on Earthquake Vulnerability Reduction (EVR-3) to promote mass awareness. Participants and resource persons from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the US attended the international training.

A group of smart physicians, nurses, and volunteers are needed to tackle the post-disaster health situation. The most important task in post-disaster situation is to secure the brain and medulla oblongata of the victim. Therefore, the first duty in a post-disaster situation is to secure the scene from unwanted crowd and protect the brain and medulla oblongata with cervical collar. Securing emergency medical service or medical first responders and attending other injuries would