

Statement of Cardinal William H. Keeler on the Death of Pope John Paul II

I am deeply saddened to learn of the death in the Lord of Pope John Paul II, who has been a “Holy Father” to me and to so many in so many ways.

Pope John Paul II has preached the Gospel of Jesus to our world. His efforts to carry the message of the Gospel as adapted for our time by the Second Vatican Council have taken him to every continent and every group of people. His calls for reconciliation, justice and peace coupled with the example of a determined and consistent commitment to what he has preached have touched many hearts. He made the Great Jubilee of the year 2000 an occasion for celebration and repentance in accord with ancient biblical principles and practices.

With the young people, he did so much good. World Youth Day, based on his experiences as a young priest in Poland, has opened the eyes of vast numbers of youth to the excitement, joy, possibilities and challenges of a life of faith.

For the Christian world, his emphasis on unity has opened new paths, especially in the dialogue with the Orthodox of the East: his meetings with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, his encouragement of this dialogue with a church so close to the Catholic Church in its inheritance from earliest days, and his travels to Eastern Europe have underscored this link with ancient Christian Churches.

For those of other faith families, especially Jews and Muslims, Pope John Paul has opened new avenues of cooperation. His visit to Israel in the year 2000 culminated a lifetime of living and working with the Jewish people to overcome differences that were so often of human making. With Muslims he has made a special effort to lift up sacred values we hold in common, including the sacredness of human life.

For Catholics, Pope John Paul II has been a “Holy Father” of exceptional gifts, the priest, poet, philosopher, bishop, prophet, survivor of Nazi and Communist

dictatorships and a principal factor in the collapse of Communism. A genius with languages and with the new ideas of our age. He will be remembered as a giant of our time, and of every time.