

# Two inside views of late pope's life

VATICAN CITY - As Pope John Paul II's sainthood cause rolled forward, two people close to him have offered quite different insider accounts of his life and times.

Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz of Krakow, the late pope's personal secretary for 39 years, has produced a conversational memoir called "A Life with Karol." In anecdotal fashion, it sketches many of their major and minor experiences together.

Pope Benedict XVI has meanwhile released "John Paul II: My Beloved Predecessor," a more analytical look at the philosophical and theological impact of his pontificate.

Although the books focus on the same subject, they don't make for redundant reading. That says something about the breadth of Pope John Paul's 26-year pontificate.

The volumes arrived in European bookstores just as church officials announced that the diocesan phase of Pope John Paul's sainthood cause would end April 2, the second anniversary of his death. The cause now goes to the Vatican.

Vatican sources cautioned that it could still be a long time before Pope John Paul is declared a saint.

But Cardinal Dziwisz, after meeting with Pope Benedict in early March, gently dropped a bombshell in a conversation with a small group of reporters in Rome. He asked whether beatification, a step that allows "local" devotion, was even necessary for a world figure like Pope John Paul.

"There is no need to rush, absolutely none. But it is certainly possible to skip the beatification and immediately begin the canonization process. This is something the

Holy Father can decide,” Cardinal Dziwisz said.

Cardinal Dziwisz’s more or less chronological account in “A Life with Karol” begins with the day Archbishop Karol Wojtyla of Krakow asked him to be his personal secretary. “When?” Father Dziwisz asked. “You can start today,” the archbishop replied. After a pause, the priest answered, “I’ll come tomorrow.”

When Pope John Paul II’s election was announced in 1978, Father Dziwisz was under the main balcony in St. Peter’s Square with a crowd of Romans, most of whom didn’t recognize Cardinal Wojtyla’s name. “That’s my bishop!” was the incredulous secretary’s first thought. “It happened!”

The book reveals some private papal moments with the world’s powerful and powerless. In Chile in 1987, shortly after being constrained to appear with Gen. Augusto Pinochet on his presidential balcony, the pope told the dictator it was time to think about handing back power to a civilian government.

After visiting Blessed Mother Teresa at her home for the dying in Calcutta in 1986, the pope whispered to her: “If I could, I’d be pope from here.”

Frequently, Cardinal Dziwisz wrote, the pope would direct his motorcade to pull over so he could visit poor families in between official stops on foreign travels to Third World countries.

The pope’s visits to his native Poland helped spark a spiritual-political revolution, and Cardinal Dziwisz tells the story from the pope’s perspective.

The book recounts that when the government allowed the pope to meet in 1983 with Solidarity leader Lech Walesa in a mountain hut, the pope figured the place must be bugged and so led Mr. Walesa outside for their talks.

Cardinal Dziwisz is adamant on the question of clandestine Vatican funding for Solidarity: It’s a myth, and never happened, he said. And although the United States

shared with the Vatican some intelligence information about Eastern Europe, “it didn’t add much to what the Holy See already knew from other sources,” he said.

Pope Benedict’s book is a collection of previous talks and essays, so there are no real revelations. Perhaps because Popes John Paul and Benedict were so much in synch on nearly every issue, press reports have focused on one minor disagreement: the Bob Dylan concert of 1997.

As news, it’s recycled – from a paper he wrote as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in 1998, for the 20th anniversary of Pope John Paul’s election. The concert closed out the World Eucharistic Congress in Bologna, Italy, and Cardinal Ratzinger said he had been skeptical of the idea of an increasingly frail and ailing pope sharing the stage with a group of rock and pop stars (“Bob Dylan and others whose names I don’t remember.”)

“They had a message that was completely different from the one the pope was committed to,” then-Cardinal Ratzinger wrote. He said he wondered whether “it was really right to let these types of ‘prophets’ intervene.”

His comment was probably aimed more at a genre of music than at Mr. Dylan, who played a short but great set for the pope and 300,000 people, including “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” and “Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door.”

Pope John Paul listened, chin in hand, and then capitalized on the moment to give a sermon based on the lyrics to “Blowin’ in the Wind.” It was a characteristic effort by someone who was always trying to build bridges to younger generations.

In response, Mr. Dylan sang an encore that seemed intended for the aging pontiff: “Forever Young.”