A Study on Pope John Paul II’s Diplomatic Practice

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Abstract: John Paul II, the 264th pope of Catholicism, was a very influential figure in the 20th century. He actively carried out social practical activities, advocated world peace and safeguarded human dignity. He visited all over the world and traveled all over six continents, creating a unique way of diplomatic visit. Based on the story of John Paul II’s diplomatic activities, this paper divides the four historical stages of his term as pope by using the method of combining historical theory. Secondly, it introduces the location of his visit and the details of his diplomatic activities at each stage. Third, it analyzes the characteristics of his diplomatic practice. John Paul II’s diplomatic practice has strong missionary enthusiasm and flexible diplomatic measures, and has a kind of transcendence. Finally, this paper summarizes his diplomatic practice and points out that John Paul II is not only a devout Catholic believer, but also a firm believer. He fulfilled his mission at a firm pace, and this process can be regarded as a pilgrimage to the heart.

1. Introduction

Pope John Paul II is an influential figure in the 20th century. His life is rich and colorful, haunting dramatic brilliance, and is a superstar in the eyes of the faith. John Paul II's term of office can be summed up in four stages, namely, the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century. In the 1970s (1978-1979), for the early days of John Paul II’s appointment, many problems left by Vatican because of the two pope vacancies remained to be solved. On the one hand, John Paul II rectifies the institutions of Vatican, on the other hand, he is actively active in the international diplomatic arena. On October 18, 1978, John Paul II received visiting envoys from various countries and intended to promote friendly relations. In 1979, John Paul II adjusted the number of cardinals and Holy See escorts, respectively. In the same year, John Paul II completed his first destination to Mexico, after which he was invited to return to Poland for a visit. With the deepening of the understanding of the changing international situation, Vatican, led by John Paul II, has also entered the second stage, that is, the stage of development and transformation (1980-1989). His diplomatic visits are increasing, visiting Munich, Rome synagogue, Britain, the United States, Nicaragua, Puerto Rican, Buenos Aires, Spain and other places, during which he pioneered World Youth Day and celebrated it in various countries. The great international changes in the 1990s made the Vatican constantly reflect and innovate. The rapid progress of modern science and technology and the disintegration of the Soviet Union prompted John Paul II to compete for the right to speak in the world. His work entered the third stage, that is, the stage of expanding influence (1990-1999). Diplomatically, John Paul II reached the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and Romania and actively visited Brazil, Denver, Cuba, Nigeria, Romania and other countries. In
1994, he was listed on the cover of *Time* (Fig 1) and became a veritable superstar. Finally, John Paul II firmly completed the pope’s mission with piety, that is, the fourth phase (2000-2005). On the practical road of practicing his faith, he returned to the pilgrimage route of St. Paul and visited Greece, Syria, Malta and other places. In 2003, he successfully completed his 100th overseas visit. In the same year, John Paul II became weaker and weaker, and the Vatican was depressed. John Paul II has left, but his influence has continued. It is understood that by 2003, he had visited 129 countries, more than 600 locations and conducted more than 2400 official conversations; the total number of hours of his foreign visits was 575 days and 12 hours; and his flight mileage was as much as 1 million kilometers, equivalent to the distance between the Earth and the moon 29 weeks or 3 times around the Earth.[1] The words “Wadowice”, “Krakow”, “Superstar”, “Idol Pope” and “Human Dignity” have become symbols of recalling John Paul II, while their thoughts and practices run through the concepts of time such as “1938”, “1946”, “1967” and “1978”. He is like a beating note, resounding through the world stage at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century.

Figure 1: John Paul II is published on the cover of *Time*.

2. John Paul II’s Diplomatic Practice

During his tenure, John Paul II has visited a number of countries and has traveled on six continents, making him the most frequent and extensive pope in Catholic history. Every time he went to a country, he expressed his friendship to the country with his signature action: “Lean over and Kiss the Earth.”[2] John Paul II inherited the spirit of the second Grand Duke of the Vatican, developed Paul VI’s diplomatic methods, and formed his own unique diplomatic strategy. As an independent country, the Vatican’s diplomatic purpose is to maintain world peace and create conditions for the normal functioning of human values. As a religion, the task of the Roman Catholic Church is to defend freedom of religious belief. John Paul II, who is both head of state and religious leader, brings together the state and religious nature, forming his four diplomatic purposes, namely, safeguarding world peace, creating conditions for the normal play of human values, safeguarding freedom of religious belief and preaching. Among them, the first two purposes belong to the national and social levels, mainly promote the preservation of human rights and human dignity. The latter two purposes belong to the belief level, mainly facing different religions in the world, spreading Catholic theological ideas.

In order to achieve the purpose of his visit, John Paul II implemented a unique approach. In areas where there are more Catholics, he engages in more frequent and large-scale diplomatic activities, such as the Polish Free Unity Union, and in areas where Catholics are less or ideologically different, such as socialist countries, he actively engages in dialogue and cautiously seeks conditions for reconciliation in the church itself. John Paul II’s rules of going out can be explored from different angles. In terms of time, his visit can be divided into three stages. From 1978 to 1980, when John Paul II needed to adapt to and deal with the internal affairs of Vatican, so he visited Mexico and Poland
only in 1979. The second stage is from 1980s to 2000, which is the peak of John Paul II’s visit, which covers the countries and regions of six continents and has broken through the scope of Catholic followers. In the third stage, from 2000 to 2005, John Paul II resumed the pilgrimage route of apostle Paul and visited Israel, Palestine, Syria, Greece, Malta and other places. Geographically, John Paul II’s diplomatic visits include Asia, Europe, Africa, Oceania, North America and South America. The specific status of the visit is as follows.

First, John Paul II visits Asia. From 1978 to 2005, he visited South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, East Timor, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Kazakhstan, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey and so on. Because of their own traditional culture and religious beliefs, John Paul II paid special attention to the localization movement of Catholicism and gradually promoted the development of Catholicism in Asia because of his own traditional culture and religious beliefs. In 1981, John Paul II paid a visit to the Philippines, calling the Philippines the only Catholic country in Asia and encouraging him to continue to be the son of God. In 1984, John Paul II was warmly welcomed by all his people in South Korea. During his visit, he negotiated with South Korean Buddhist leaders and was presented with Buddhist beads as a token of memory. Religion plays an important role in Korean society. John Paul II hopes to be friendly with all religions while spreading the gospel in Korea. On the one hand, it is beneficial to the development of religion, on the other hand, it is also conducive to political stability. John Paul II was saluted by the army when he arrived in Sri Lanka in 1995. He then met with religious leaders in Colombo to make recommendations for the development of religion in Sri Lanka. In 2001, John Paul II went to the mosque himself during his visit to Syria, becoming the first pope to set foot on friendly exchanges between the mosque and Islam.

Second, John Paul II visits Europe. Western Europe has long been regarded as the hometown of Catholicism, which retains the tradition of Catholic belief. At the same time, due to the history of the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church stands proudly in Eastern European society. As a result, John Paul II did not give up exchanges with Eastern European countries while visiting Western European countries. The European countries visited by John Paul II include Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and both Northern, Southern and Central Europe. Visits to Western Europe include the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and France; Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine in Eastern Europe; and Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Denmark in Northern Europe. In southern Europe are Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Greece, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Marino, Malta, Spain and Portugal, as well as Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Liechtenstein in Central Europe. In June 1979, John Paul II returned to his hometown of Poland and spoke in Warsaw and Krakow, urging workers to fight for rights and interests from the government, which was secretly monitored and suppressed by the government. However, it did not stop the people from following in his footsteps, and the subsequent establishment of the United Trade Union of Trade Unions (Solidarnosc) forced the Polish government to compromise. When John Paul II visited Poland again in 1983, Jaruzelski, then head of the Polish government, met with him trembling, indicating that John Paul II’s position in the hearts of the Polish people had aroused the fear of the government. However, although John Paul II has a slight political advantage, he cannot get rid of religious conservatism. In 1980, his speech in Munich, Germany, was questioned by a little girl who asked John Paul II about the relationship between the young men and women of Vatican, the celerity of the priest and the ability of women to participate in church posts. Instead, he used a gesture to avoid her and let the program continue. He was deeply aware of the contradictions in the church, but failed to be open to practical problems. Just a few minor repairs on a few issues. For example, during his visit to Austria in 1983, he severely criticized the church for its stillness and low number of people, pointing out that rigid religious rules should be changed in an effort to preach. This minor repair is only temporary, and the conservatism in his mind
has aroused the dissatisfaction of many church people. The French church has put forward opposition to the monarchy of the priest, the optional appointment of women as priests, the recognition of abortion and so on. These manifestations of secularization of religion have been opposed by John Paul II. During his visit to France on October 4, 1986, John Paul II criticized: “As the eldest daughter of the church, are you still loyal to your promise when you received the baptism?” It can be seen that John Paul II’s visit to Europe has always been hovering in the competition between religious secularization and Catholic tradition. As far as the church is concerned, John Paul II strives to improve relations with other religions. On 13 April 1986, John Paul II visited the synagogue for the first time; on 7 May 1999, he paid an official visit to the Orthodox Church in Romania. These religious visits have earned John Paul II a good reputation outside the Catholic Church.

Third, John Paul II visited Africa. John Paul II believes that Africa is the second hometown of Catholicism. His attention to population issues, anti-abortion and hedonistic indulgence all resonate with the African people. The etiquette culture in Africa follows the tradition of Vatican. John Paul II attaches importance to the development of the family and has won the recognition of the African people. John Paul II believes that Africa is the place where the church grows. The African countries he has visited include Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia and Morocco in North Africa; Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Seychelles in East Africa; and Chad, Central Africa, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, the Congo and Sao Tome and Principe in Central Africa. Senegal, the Gambia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Upper Volta, Zaire, Kenya, Nigeria and Angola in West Africa, and Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Botswana, the Republic of South Africa, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius and Reunion in South Africa. In 1980, John Paul II promoted his view of marriage and family during a visit to Kenya: “Christian families are also the church’s family sanctuaries. The family is the place where the gospel is received and lived, and overflows from the family. In addition, the family gives daily and sometimes silent testimony to the truth and grace of God’s holy word.” In 1985, John Paul II addressed 80,000 Muslim youth at the Casablanca football field in Morocco, emphasizing that Christians and Muslims share the value of common sympathy and prayer, and that believers should continue to work for humanitarianism.

Fourth, John Paul II visited North America. Because of his respect for human rights, freedoms and culture, John Paul II was judged as a lawyer and spokesman in the eyes of Americans, whether in North or South America, the gospel of "Unity" acted as a political "liberation theology". In North America, John Paul II has visited Canada, the United States, Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, the Bahamas, Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Saint Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, Curacao Island, Puerto Rican and other places. In 1979, John Paul II attended the Latin American Bishops’ Conference during his visit to Mexico. At that time, Latin America was full of contradictions, and Catholic conservatives, represented by Spain, were opposed to the ruling class, which held liberation theology. In his speech in Puebla, John Paul II made it clear that the priest could not put politics first and should devote himself to religion at the center of the church, which was praised by conservatives. On the one hand, John Paul II showed the authority of the pope, on the other hand, he cared for the peoples of North America. In September 1984, during his visit to Canada, he visited Huron women and children in tents and was loved by the local population. At the same time, he went to the United States many times to promote human rights ideas. He opposed military wars in Vietnam, Nicaragua, Salvador and other places and repeatedly called for
world peace at the United Nations General Assembly. He described himself as a witness to human
dignity and hope at the 1995 United Nations General Assembly. He witnessed the belief that the fate
of all nations was mercifully blessed by God. John Paul II continued to practice his human rights
ideas and advocated respect for life during his trip. In 1996, he visited Guatemala to meet with
President Alvaro Arzu and personally bless the local baby.

Fifth, John Paul II visited South America and Oceania. He has visited Colombia, Venezuela,
Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and other South American
countries. It is worth noting that John Paul II was provoked by local sources during his visit to Chile
in 1987. During the large open-air mass, the disorder of burning tires did not stop his speech. Instead,
he knelt down calmly and prayed, exalting the will not to abandon the flock, and was respected by the
local masses. During his visit to Bolivia in May 1988, he cordially shook hands with local women and
expressed his love for his fellow women. In addition, John Paul II visited Australia, New Zealand,
Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Guam and so on in Oceania.

Looking at John Paul II’s trip, he lasted for a total of 26 years (Fig 2); he visited a wide range of six
continents (Fig 3). From a financial point of view, he went out to visit more expensive, but in
exchange for more donations. As George Boer, a British scholar, put it: “If the pope goes everywhere
to appeal to devout Catholics to show loyalty and generosity to help solve the financial problem, there
will be more work.” Although there are different views on John Paul II’s trip within the church, his
“Travel” voice is fading away as his influence in the world continues to expand and his benefits
continue to increase.

Figure 2: 2003 Vatican Stamp Commemorating the 25th Anniversary of John Paul II’s Accession to
the Throne

Figure 3: Stamp Commemorating John Paul II’s Visit to the World by the Vatican in 1989

3. The Characteristics of John Paul II’s Diplomatic Practice

First, John Paul II’s diplomatic practice has the characteristics of strong missionary enthusiasm.
One of the purposes of his visit was to preach, and it was both the pope’s duty and his personal wish to
spread his beliefs around the world. Out of consideration of the development of Vatican, John Paul II
visited many countries frequently to care about the development of churches everywhere. Vatican’s
diplomacy focuses on the preservation of Catholic beliefs. To this end, John Paul II used the diplomatic visit as a channel of contact between Vatican and the local church. In 1979, John Paul II attended the Latin American Bishops’ Conference during his visit to Mexico. As far as the relationship between politics and religion is concerned, he severely criticizes the position of the school of liberating gods and distinguishes politics from religion. After winning the support of conservatives in the Latin American church, he actively advocated dialogue with Marxism. He believes that the seeds of the holy word exist in everyone, and that dialogue can make people feel the grace of God. Another example is John Paul II’s repeated visits to his hometown of Poland during his tenure, calling on workers to seek freedom. The Polish Federation of Unity and Trade Unions, formed by Catholics, has had a great impact on the local society. This shows that John Paul II has achieved the purpose of preaching through diplomacy, and many Polish people have joined the church and carried out social activities in accordance with John Paul II’s requirements. Therefore, John Paul II’s diplomacy has a strong missionary color.

Second, John Paul II’s diplomatic practice is characterized by flexibility. John Paul II’s diplomatic visit has both a political and a religious side. Because of the different groups he faced, John Paul II had to give full play to his adaptability. However, a change in form does not change the firmness of faith. In the form of change, he believed that God was the only one he relied on. On the road to achieve diplomatic purposes, he applied this unique ability to respond to diplomatic measures, forming the flexible characteristics of diplomatic measures, which can be expressed in different aspects. As far as political diplomacy is concerned, John Paul II’s approach to dealing with affairs shows flexibility. In 1983, there was an opposition between two regimes in Poland. During John Paul II’s visit, he maintained contact with the two governments at the same time, as well as with the underground organization Uniting Trade Union. From a diplomatic point of view, he did not prefer which side, but to do his part as a religious leader. However, Unity Federation of Trade Unions was formed by Catholics at his call, and John Paul II did not abandon his love for those people. At the same time, the way in which he contacted the three parties showed the flexibility of his diplomatic means, and he was able to weigh developments among personnel of various backgrounds so that he could advance and retreat freely. Subsequently, he held a dialogue with the leaders of the Soviet Union, and it can be said that John Paul II played his diplomatic strategy well in dealing with Eastern European affairs. Whether it is dealing with relations within Poland or with the Soviet Union, he advocates dialogue and opposes violent confrontation. As Gorbachev put it: “All the things that have happened in Eastern Europe over the past few years would not have happened without the participation of the pope, who knows how to play this indispensable and great political role on the world stage.” Therefore, from the result of political influence, John Paul II’s diplomatic means and dialogue strategy show the characteristics of flexibility. As far as the settlement of international disputes is concerned, John Paul II does not comment on the events of war, but calls for peace objectively in his capacity as a pacifist. For example, he did not regard the Gulf War as a Muslim jihad, but as a secular war triggered by secular reasons, an impartial gesture thanked by the Organization of Muslim countries. On the one hand, he showed his image of peace in the international arena, on the other hand, he also won a good impression of Catholicism from Islam, laying the foundation for the realization of his goal of uniting monotheism. As the scholar Wang Weijia put it: “In John Paul’s view, there is no reason not to let the world’s monotheists unite.” This strategy of killing two birds with one stone reflects the flexibility of John Paul II’s diplomatic measures. As far as pastoral visits are concerned, John Paul II’s approach to dealing with different interviewees is flexible. In 1980, when John Paul II’s speech in Germany was questioned and deeply disagreed by a little girl, only one gesture was used to keep the show going, cleverly avoiding her. During John Paul II’s visit to Nicaragua in 1983, the government arranged for Ernesto Caldenaar, a Catholic faculty member serving in the ministry of culture, to meet him at the airport. Learning that John Paul II was not
allowed to participate in politics, Ernasto Calderner, aware of his difficult situation in political and religious relations, knelt down after John Paul II got off the plane to kiss his ring. John Paul II, however, did not forgive him and quickly pulled his hand back and reprimanded him with his middle finger. From the above events, we can see that John Paul II’s diplomatic attitude varies from person to person and varies from person to person. He has often demonstrated the authority of the pope in foreign affairs, but has sometimes been challenged. In 1987, when he had an open-air mass in Chile, some people disturbed the scene by burning tires. In the face of the grim reality, John Paul II put down the authority of the pope, knelt on his knees and prayed, winning the respect of the local people in a humble way. During his pastoral visits, mild scenes are often striking. In September 1984, John Paul II shook hands with Huron women in tents during a visit to Canada. In the same year, he was given Buddhist beads in South Korea, demonstrating John Paul II’s ability to properly handle religious relations. In 1989, John Paul II hugged African children tightly on his way to Antananarivo, Madagascar, to make them feel sacred affinity. In 1990, John Paul II greeted them with sympathy when he visited Guomura’s patients in Guinea-Bissau. He reacted differently to different subjects, all of which reflected the flexible nature of John Paul II’s diplomatic measures during the pastoral visit. Taken together, John Paul II’s diplomatic measures are flexible.

Third, John Paul II’s diplomatic practice has a transcendent feature. The pope is the head of the universal Catholic church and has the power of bishops, which exceeds the powers of bishops above other bishops, that is, the chief bishop; he is nominally on an equal footing with all bishops, but he has the power to appoint other bishops, so, what he said is very authoritative. Article 375 of the Catholic Code states, “Bishops are appointed by God to succeed to the apostle, and by virtue of the Holy Spirit given to them, he is established as a shepherd in the church, making him a teacher of doctrine, a priest of sacred salutation, and a servant of governance.”(Episcopi, qui ex divina institutione in Apostolorum locum succedunt per Spiritum Sanctum qui datus est eis, in Ecclesia Pastores constituuntur, ut sint et ipsi doctrinae magistri, sacri cultus sacerdotes et gubernationis ministri.) The post of “Bishop” plays an important role within the Catholic Church. Within church sanctity, Catholicism divides the world into different dioceses according to territorial principles and arranges a bishop to each diocese in accordance with spiritual principles. It should be noted that Catholicism has established a province for the convenience of management, each of which has an archbishop, or archbishop, to manage affairs. However, the status of archbishop is not a direct subordinate relationship with bishops in other parts of the province, it is a nominal title. Bishops play a central role in the Catholic Church, and the bishops of each diocese are equal to each other. Because the Roman diocese has a central position in all the dioceses of the world, the bishops of the Roman diocese have a core power. Article 231 of the Catholic Code states: “The bishop of the Roman Church shall enjoy the office of Berdor, the head of the apostle alone, and this position shall also be passed on to his heirs. Therefore, the pope is the head of the Bishops of the world, the representative of Christ, and the shepherd of the universal church in this world; therefore, by virtue of this office, he has the highest, complete and direct authority in the universal church and is often free to do so.”(Ecclesiae Romanae Episcopus, in quo permanet munus a Domino singulariter Petro, primo Apostolorum, concessum et successoribus eius transmittendum, Collegii Episcoporum est caput, Vicarius Christi atque universae Ecclesiae his in terris Pastor; quideo vi muneri sui suprema, plena, immediata et universali in Ecclesia gaudet ordinaria potestate, quam semper libere exercere valet.) It is precisely because the pope is the bishop of the Roman diocese and is recognized as the heir to the apostle Peter that the pope has a bishops superior to other bishops, which is the chief pope. Therefore, John Paul II’s power is transcendental. From a diplomatic point of view, because John Paul II has transcendent chief espionage, he can sign diplomatic laws and conclude diplomatic relations with international organizations on behalf of the Presbyterian Church. This can reflect two transcendence: first, John Paul II represents the whole universal Catholic church with the power of the chief bishop; at the same
time, as stipulated in the church code, he is free to exercise this representation to sign with international organizations, which is a transcendence of power within the church. Secondly, in 1979, John Paul II mentioned at the United Nations General Assembly that the sovereignty of Vatican and the Church belongs to the kingdom of the world and that its sovereign territory is the Vatican City State, but sovereignty itself can be exercised freely by the pope as necessary and can handle problems with any country or regional organization on his own. This is a transcendence relative to the sacred scope of management of secular regimes. On the one hand, he recognizes the limitations of territorial power, but at the same time, he believes that the sovereignty of the church does not belong to the real world, which means that this sovereignty has broken through the narrow geographical scope of the Vatican. On the other hand, he claims that he can deal with problems with any country or region, which means that he has not limited his diplomatic sovereignty to those countries that have established diplomatic relations with the Vatican, and that countries that have not established diplomatic relations with the Vatican are also within the scope of his exchanges. This has virtually expanded the scope of management of Catholic secular power. Just as John Paul II established diplomatic relations with more than a hundred countries through visits to various parts of the world. Therefore, John Paul II’s diplomacy has a transcendence.

4. Conclusion

In summarize, John Paul II’s diplomatic practice has the characteristics of flexibility and transcendence, and has a strong enthusiasm for missionary. Safeguarding human dignity and advocating world peace are what he vigorously advocates, which is not only his duty as pope, but also a realistic manifestation of his personal ideals and aspirations. John Paul II, a devout Catholic believer, spread his beliefs around the world with practical actions, praised and admired within the church. Before becoming pope, he was a knowledgeable, rigorous and simple Catholic scholar; after he was elected pope, he turned his faith into a force under his feet and could be regarded as a pious pilgrimage, which was not only the duty of the pope, but also reflected his personal belief. John Paul II fulfilled his mission at a firm pace and could be seen as a pilgrimage to his heart. The way he pioneered a diplomatic visit was also emulated by later popes.

References