

This advertisement appeared in the Op-Ed section of the New York Times on October 27, 1996.

CONGRATULATIONS, HOLY FATHER

For Catholics, November 1 is All Saints Day. Appropriately, this November 1 is also the 50th anniversary of Pope John Paul II's ordination to the priesthood. So beloved is he that many are already calling him John Paul the Great.

What makes this pope so special is that he is the greatest moral teacher of the twentieth century. Unlike politicians scrambling for votes, Pope John Paul II does not tailor his teachings to fit the latest ideological trends. Unlike other world leaders, he does not seek to time his words to the meter of elite opinion. And unlike other moral teachers, he does not waver in his commitment to God's law.

Still, some demur. Why doesn't Pope John Paul II get with the times and abandon "unfashionable" Church teachings about sex and the sanctity of human life?

Freedom, as Pope John Paul II has said, means the right to do what we ought; it does not mean the right to always do as we want. That's a tough sell in a world where "happiness" is identified with indulging every appetite—no matter how depraved. But it remains true: a concept of liberty that allows for the killing of innocents and the liberation of the libido is *aperversion* of freedom.

"Let your conscience be your guide" is a popular refrain. It was also popular with every butcher in the twentieth century, from Hitler to Jeffrey Dahmer. Pope John Paul II knows better:

there is a profound difference between a well-formed conscience and a conscience grounded in self-interest.

The Holy Father succeeds because he rises above reigning ideologies by proclaiming eternal truths. And he is loved by millions precisely because they find in him the greatest moral resource on earth. His legacy will be as emulated as it will be lasting, and that is why he will be known as John Paul the Great.