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Beatifications and Politics

by Maureen Fiedler

NCR Today

E.J. Dionne wrote a very insightful column in today's *Washington Post* (April 28) calling for a fast track to sainthood for Pope John XXIII. He acknowledges that church politics put Pope John Paul II on a "fast track" to beatification, while noting that Pope John XXIII's beatification was kept on a slow track, and completed only when paired with the beatification of the super-reactionary Pope Pius IX.

He reminds us that John Paul II's work would not have been possible without the revolutionary contributions of Pope John XXIII who, he notes, "ended Catholicism's war on modernity by calling the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960's." Here is the link to his column.

E.J. rightly notes that many Catholics have mixed feelings about John Paul II because he swept many sex abuse scandals under the rug and condemned many dissenting theologians.

Yet E.J. is too kind in his assessment of Pope John Paul II. He rightly gives him credit for personal magnetism, for his strong condemnations of anti-Semitism and for his willingness to forgive his would-be assassin. He cites his commitment to workers' rights, religious liberty and social justice in the broad sense of that phrase.

But he does not, it seems to me, recognize John Paul's role in closing some of the windows that John XXIII threw open in the church. John Paul II actually stifled much of the optimism and hope that flowed from Vatican II. His condemnation of liberation theology disheartened the poor of Latin America. His failure to understand either feminist theology or the rising role of women in today's world contradicted many of his other commitments to human rights in the secular world. His misunderstanding of gays and lesbians was disheartening.

In addition, John Paul's refusal to consider either a married priesthood or the ordination of women helped

create the priest shortage that stifles the growth of Eucharistic communities in the church on a global scale today.

None of us can judge John Paul the person; only God can do that. But his historical legacy as Pope is very mixed, at best.

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