

lectual of modern popes may have sincerely felt he was protecting the integrity and moral authority of the church by "unpopular" decisions, the weight of scholarly theological—not just popular—opinion *within* the Church has not supported him; and, in the long run, he has inadvertently undermined the very authority he sought to uphold. Meanwhile, he has expended his physical energies so generously, but most diplomatically, as a traveling symbol for peace—in a worldly arena where, as Josef Stalin cynically but correctly observed, the Pope has no armed divisions. To his credit, on social, political, economic and international issues the Pope's thinking and teaching have been consistently more progressive than those of most American Catholics; but, except in general terms, they have never been communicated with the same force as the church's sexual discipline to the Church at large.

It may be argued that if Paul VI had been any stronger and more specific in his attacks on economic

injustice and, for example, the level of American violence in Vietnam—particularly in requiring follow-through from American bishops—he would have undiplomatically "alienated his constituency." Yet, Jesus, one might answer, did not ask Peter to be a diplomat. He asked him to feed his sheep and expect a violent death. Paul VI, ever sensitive and intelligent, knew that too. In his last months he once offered himself to take the place of a hijacking hostage and later, in another burst of feeling, escaped the papal "We" to plead with terrorists for the life of Aldo Moro: "I love him as a member of the great human family, as a brother in faith and a son of the Church of Christ." Because of the way he chose to live and because of the way he understood his office, Giovanni Battista Montini will never be understood the way any human being as sensitive as himself would like to be understood. But he has earned his own sentence—"I love him as a member of the great human family . . ."—as his epitaph.

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## AGENDA FOR THE PAPACY

What the Church needs from the next Pope

### SHAKING DOWN & SORTING OUT

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As a group politicians are not remarkable for their sense of history. They tend to exaggerate the significance of the immediate and the ephemeral. Thus, a forthcoming presidential election is confidently described as the most critical election in U.S. history. Our governmental institutions, our free enterprise system, our personal liberties, our commitment to social justice, our standing in the forum of nations will somehow hang in the balance.

For that reason there was always something peculiarly attractive and refreshing about the understated, almost diffident rhetoric of Eugene McCarthy. Many things are indeed important, and some things are even very important. But events which alter the course of history—even of a single nation or church—are truly rare, and they are unpredictable in any case.

These reservations notwithstanding, I propose the following thesis: Barring abbreviation by sudden death, the term of the new Pope will prove to be the most crucial in modern Church history, rivaled only by Pope John XXIII's. The thesis has to be explained against the background of the pontificate just concluded.

During the course of Pope Paul VI's incumbency, the Catholic Church showed at least three different faces. From 1963, with only one of four council sessions completed, until 1968, with the publication of *Humanae Vitae*, the Church seemed marked by excitement, even enthusiasm. To be a member of the Church in those years meant being part of something on the move, something perceived by insider and outsider alike as having value, as having the capacity to make a difference to the quality of life and the direction of world events.

From the summer of the encyclical to the fall of 1971, with the issuance of the Third International Synod of Bishops' declaration on the ordained priesthood, the Church showed the strains of conflict, tension, unrest, and anger. Church attendance and vocations fell; departures from the priesthood and religious life increased.

Although the 1971 synod spoke with exceeding wisdom and courage on the matter of social justice, its pronouncement on the priesthood made it clear that there would be, indeed there could be, no additional institutional reforms of any significance during the reign of Paul VI. And so, with the shouting having subsided and the rhetoric softened, the Church entered a period of quiet attrition at a slower but inexorable pace.

The conventional wisdom asserts that the new Pope should be like his predecessor, a moderate conservative. How else will he be able to hold the Church together? He must steer the same middle course, suffering

Küng and Lefebvre alike. If there is to be a concession to modernity or to public opinion, let it be only in the personality of the new Pope. Let him be a less anguished figure, more benign, more *simpatico*, less plaintive.

I do not agree with this point of view. Given the state of mind of many in the Catholic Church today and given the range of their expectations for the future, a moderately conservative Pope will only intensify the frustrations of both right and left alike. History may someday look very kindly upon these fifteen Pauline years, but I should doubt very much that history will have any praise for a successor who tries simply to reproduce those years over the next decade and a half.

What the Catholic Church needs now is a shaking down and a sorting out. If Providence has her on a conservative course, then let that become unmistakably clear under the new Pope so that those who cannot abide such a course will be able to pursue other options for the sake of God's Kingdom without further delay. And if Providence has a more progressive course for the Church, then let *that* be unmistakably clear so that those who could not really accept Vatican II and have been waiting in hope for the day of its effective repeal will be free to pursue the holy grail of orthodoxy in some other Christian household.

The new Pope will not be able to keep his ecclesiological cards hidden for very long. They will have to be placed on the table, one by one, as he makes his first important appointments, as he issues his first encyclical, as he responds to the first major challenge to his authority from left or right.

To be sure, there are far more important issues facing the Church over the long expanse of human history than are the issues of birth control, clerical celibacy, and the ordination of women. But a Pope's approach to such issues as these is symptomatic of his approach to the deeper issues they imply: the meaning of human sexuality and its relationship to psychic and spiritual growth; male-female complementarity; the interpretation and mediation of the divine will; the scope and limitations of ecclesiastical authority; the principles of subsidiarity and coresponsibility as hallmarks of a Church that is first and foremost a community.

I have deliberately included no reference here to the painfully evident gap between rich and poor, oppressor and oppressed. It is not because I think that the new Pope can afford to be inattentive to the demands of justice and peace, but that issues of justice and peace in the world at large cannot be divorced from issues of justice and peace in the Church herself. An ecclesiastical leader who proves indecisive about the latter will be inevitably less convincing about the former.

Accordingly, we should look forward to a new Petrine minister who will, without prejudice to due process and his responsibility to mount reasonable and

persuasive arguments, (1) revoke the anti-contraception teaching of *Humanae Vitae* (while reaffirming the Church's concern for human life at every stage of development); (2) abolish obligatory celibacy for priests (while encouraging on a case-by-case basis the readmission of married priests to active ministry); and (3) set in motion forces which will lead eventually to the full incorporation of qualified women to priestly and episcopal ministry (beginning perhaps with the diaconate, since ordination of women to the priesthood remains the one reform-issue which continues to evoke a large negative response from the Church's general membership, including women).

A Pope with the theological vision and pastoral courage to pursue such initiatives as these can provide the Church with a kind of leadership that is at once unambiguous and progressive. At least there would no longer be any serious doubt about the Church's future course.

## GENUINE COMMUNICATION

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I see the failure of the pontificate just ended as a failure to promote creative communication within the Church. Correspondingly, the chief task for the new pope is to remove the institutional barriers to such communication. That would release the creative energies of Catholics. The limiting assumption would be dropped that all that has to be done is to adapt what already exists.

To be creative communication must be free from domination and proceed in a mutual recognition of personal autonomy. That demands advancing beyond the "conventional" stage of consciousness, at which Catholic leaders themselves seem to be stuck and at which, at any rate, they want to keep the rest of the church.

I am, of course, using the distinction made by Lawrence Kohlberg between the conventional and the post-conventional or autonomous levels of moral consciousness. At the conventional level, an individual simply follows the fixed rules of his social group. The moral stance is one of conformity; the orientation is towards authority and the law and order of a particular social system. At the post-conventional level, self-reflection gives rise to a distinction between formulated rules and the universal principles that generate the rules. Individuals reach an autonomy of conscience, enabling them, if need be, to create new rules.

The identity of the autonomous person is not tied to particular social institutions or to the fixed contents