

also mark a victory for the counsels of moderation and pragmatism against the voices of dogmatism and fanaticism.

What's the effect on American interests?

This is a victory for the American policy objective of seeking to achieve a stable and peaceful Middle East that will be less vulnerable to extremist, especially Communist, "adventurism." It reinforces the unique role of the United States as the only major power trusted by states on both sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and thus represents another setback for Soviet policy in the Middle East.

(An excerpt from a document prepared by George Gruen of the American Jewish Committee, Phil Baum of the American Jewish Congress, and Ken Jacobson of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, and circulated jointly by the above organizations.)

EXCURSUS IV

*Roger Mithrite on
After Paul and Medellín, ? and Puebla*

Anno Domini 1978 will be registered as a year of particular significance for the Roman Catholic Church. The death of Pope Paul VI, the election and sudden death of John Paul, and the election of his successor are, of course, the most significant newsworthy events. On a different level the meeting of the bishops of Latin America in Puebla, Mexico, postponed, because of the death of John Paul, to next month, will have far-reaching consequences, not only for the church in Latin America, but for the entire Church.

It is one of the paradoxes of the reign of Paul VI that he followed a pope who was elected as a safe, transitional figure and became an astounding innovator, while Paul, whose whole training was a marvelous if traditional preparation for the papacy, necessarily functioned as a transitional pope. Those who would assess this complicated man must cope with a series of such paradoxes. (Pope John Paul served too short a time, unfortunately, to establish any record.)

It is, in fact, difficult to offer a fair overall assessment of Paul's accomplishments and failures so soon after his death. The immediate and seemingly secure judgments offered by the media will look very different when they and the time in which they were written come, in their turn, under judgment. But what emerges will be a testimony to the importance of the particular person who is elected to the papacy. It makes a difference who sits on the papal throne. Even large, ungainly bureaucracies can be affected by a true leader.

But if leaders make a real difference, it remains

true that not everything depends upon the leader—in this case the pontiff of the Catholic Church. There are other forces at work, sometimes in concert with the efforts of the pope, sometimes in parallel, and sometimes at cross-purposes. During the fifteen years Paul served as pope and as head of state he addressed many large questions. He spoke on, for example, religious, political, economic, military, and sexual issues. Many of the particular questions he spoke to remain unresolved. In trying to bank the heated controversies on such matters as contraception, a married priesthood, or the ordination of women he merely insured they would burn more intensely. On questions of the arms race, the international economic order, and human rights he spoke out forcefully and prepared at least directions that others might follow. But in the one area to which I would direct attention, on the question that will engage the Church intensely during the next decades, the question of the social doctrine of the Church, the question of the relative merits of liberalism, capitalism, and socialism, his contribution is inadequate and somewhat ambiguous.

Pope Paul inherited a tradition of well-developed thought on political, social, and economic orders, and, early in his reign, he stated that the relation, the struggle, between developed and undeveloped countries would become more important than the East-West relation. But in 1971 he could say: "In view of the varied situations in the world, it is difficult to give one teaching to cover them all or to offer a solution which has universal value. This is not our intention or even our mission." Instead there is to be a "pluralism of options." The humility may be appropriate, but it is an innovation in the tradition of modern Catholic thought, of "Christian social doctrine"—if not a break with it. The papal encyclicals are famous, if not notorious, for enunciating broad generalities that are to be applied differently in different situations. But Paul chose otherwise.

In the meantime a number of Catholic thinkers and activists have attempted to take on a large part of the task that Paul eschewed. Many of these people draw their inspiration from the 1968 Medellín Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) and the theological-political ferment that followed. In the United States the term most frequently associated with Medellín is "theology of liberation." The articles and books and activities that claim patrimony in this theology are numerous, and qualifications and discrimination are called for. One cannot simply lump together Segundo, Miranda, Sobrino, Ellacuría, and Arroyo. Nevertheless, several important characteristics can be stated. Gustavo Gutiérrez, the "grand old man" of liberation theology, said early on that it was not merely a new theme for reflection but a new way to do theology, becoming "part of the process through which the world is transformed." Part of what needs to be transformed, to be overcome, is "social sin," the oppression of the poor by institutional violence and injus-

tice. Drawing acknowledged inspiration from Marx, the oppressive structures are identified as the national oligarchies and, even worse, the present international economic order. If one is to do liberation theology seriously, one then becomes involved in the process of transforming, of overcoming, these sinful structures. For many this means working for the displacement of capitalism by socialism.

Now this is heady stuff, explosive in fact. And it has enlisted in its cause many brave, committed, talented, passionate men and women. Given the present condition of much of Latin America, it is not surprising that many of these people, in struggling actively for the poor, the imprisoned, the tortured, have lost their lives. Nor is it surprising that the judgments, if not also the motives, of those most publicly committed have been attacked. It is to be expected that Father Roger Vekemans, well known as an enemy of the theology of liberation, would be untiringly critical. But critical, too, is the general secretary of CELAM, Bishop Alfonso López Trujillo (no relation to the scoundrel).

To be possibly overdramatic, lines of battle were drawn up for Puebla. On one side were those who wish to participate in and develop the theology of liberation. For them this means becoming politically and socially involved on behalf of the poor, sensitizing the consciousness of the poor to their oppressed conditions, denouncing capitalism as exploitative, working closely with the poor in small base communities, fighting against violations of human rights wherever possible.

But these committed enthusiasts were not without their critics. The main charges are that they are mistaken—in spite of Paul VI—about the compatibility of Christianity and socialism; that they are naive about Marxism and its necessary implications; that they distort the Bible when they identify the proletariat with *anawim* and make it the vanguard of salvation; that the encouragement of class conflict is incompatible with a message of peace.

Still, the battle lines that have been drawn are not all that clear. Not everyone is enlisted in just one or the other of the camps I have described. There are those who are sympathetic with many of the goals of liberation theology *and* who do not want to be supporters of Vekeman's position but who question the liberationists' empirical analyses of the situation. Some of this group would enlist under the banner of Paul VI who said, when in the slums of Manila in 1970:

I must also remind you, in virtue of my apostolic ministry, that apart from material bread—apart from the temporal well-being to which you rightfully aspire, and for the attainment of which all should be united with you—you, like all men, have other higher needs. . . . This is the great illusion of our times: to think that the supreme aim of life consists in struggling for and winning economic and social, temporal and external goods. You are created for a higher good.

This is not a call to reward the materially poor with spiritual riches alone. All should work to alleviate the grinding poverty under which so many suffer. But though that is an immediate, urgent need, there are others.

The issues involved are matters of life and death. Good and passionate people will follow different paths in attempting to respond to these needs. They will often be locked in violent disagreement. The person of John Paul's successor and the process of the CELAM conferences will help shape the determination of these issues long after 1978.

Roger Mithrite has been a close observer of the Latin American church for many years.

QUOTE / UNQUOTE

On the Gaucheness of Stepping on People While Wearing the Wrong Sort of Shoes

The worst mistake a man can make, Mr. von Fürstenberg said, is to wear his pants too short. . . .

Mr. von Fürstenberg, who is soft-spoken and boyish and constantly smiling, does not come across as a power hungry man who strongly believes in working hard to achieve *The Power Look*. But he said his looks camouflaged his drive.

"In our society and our way of living, that's what it's all about," he said, "advancing and not caring about other people. I know what I want. If I didn't, do you think I would be visiting 18 cities in 22 days to plug my book?"

—Judy Klemesrud in an interview with Egon von Fürstenberg, author of *The Power Look* (*New York Daily Metro*, September 26)

Tales From the Siberian Woods

It has been reported that at the main Doubleday bookstore on Fifth Avenue, New York, the *Gulag Archipelago* is housed in the fiction section.

Goodbye Mr. Pérez-Esclarin

. . . I finished the book hurriedly, overcoming myself continually, thinking that perhaps it might help someone after all. I feel no desire at all to go back over it and touch it up. Furthermore, I want these lines to be my final goodbye to the intellectual world. I have felt its attractions, but I think I have discovered its phoniness. . . .

—Antonio Pérez-Esclarin in his "personal epilogue" to *Atheism and Liberation*