The continuing pertinence of Christian social reflection

Paul VI at Eighty

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The Universal Declaration on the Rights of Man is equally important today; it has indicated a course that cannot be abandoned if mankind sincerely wishes to achieve peace. The events of our days, unfortunately, make it evident that this brotherly collaboration in an atmosphere of respect and understanding is still cruelly contradicted in many parts of the world, by radical, ideological and religious discrimination, by forceful subjection of weaker nations, by political regimes which deprive citizens of just freedom, by recourse to threats and violence instead of recourse to negotiations to resolve conflicts of self-interest. It is impossible to have true and lasting peace where human rights are unrecognized, violated and trampled upon.

—Paul VI, message to U.N. General Assembly president on commemoration of twentieth anniversary of Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man, December 4, 1968

September 26, 1977, marks the eightieth birthday of Giovanni Battista Montini. This does not make him the oldest pope of this century by any means. The first pope to die in the twentieth century was Leo XIII, who was ninety-three and who finished a good part of his well-known work after eighty. No man, fortunately, knows how long he will live, and Paul VI has mentioned several times that he cannot expect to be about for long. But this is mostly the wise insight of any elderly human being. (I myself have no doubt that the character of Paul VI is such that he would resign were he seriously incapacitated.) In any case, change of power, not least that of ecclesiastical power, remains one of the most fascinating of cultural questions. And Paul holds what is by far the oldest continuing office in the world.

Although Paul VI is in many ways a familiar figure throughout the world—he is the most traveled pope in history—it is difficult to find a fair and adequate evaluation of the really remarkable corpus of thought he has persistently and firmly contributed to our time. This is to be expected of any living public figure, of course. Still, Paul VI has generally received an unaccountably bad press for his merits, especially from Roman Catholics. Since he is a religious man, a pope of the Roman Catholic Church, he is much broader and more complicated than my comments on the social critic and philosopher in him will suggest.

Paul speaks as much by actions and symbols as by words—and his words are heard, using St. Thomas’s famous phrase in a slightly different context, “after the manner of the recipient.” Our own spiritual, philosophical, and political persuasions often determine how we choose to hear this man and what we will emphasize. Further, in order to confront his thought it is necessary to search very unacademic-seeming sources, such as Wednesday general audiences or letters to Etienne Gilson or addresses to the secretary general of FAO or to the general of the Society of Jesus. These are all public documents, to be sure, yet without effort we can easily miss them—which is a pity, because they are richly informative and filled with insights.

This being granted as inevitable and not altogether bad (the papacy long ago learned that it must address itself largely to normal, everyday people as well as to theologians and world leaders), the occasion of Paul’s eightieth birthday calls not merely for an appreciation but for lively attention directed to the core of what this remarkable pope has, in fact, been arguing and telling us over these past fourteen years. For some time I have felt that among the world’s leaders of the past quarter century Giovanni Montini may well have been the most intellectually accomplished and acute. His intelligence is, perhaps, much too “French” for the English-speaking world. Indeed, much of his contribution to social and political ideas arises out of French traditions, even French prejudices, just as much of Pius XII’s had a German flavor. But whether through French, Italian, or Spanish, Paul has at his fingertips an avenue to the mind and formation of a great part of the modern world.

Moreover, as head of state, with wide-ranging diplo-
mastic and religious ties. Paul VI is necessarily exposed to the major currents of our time in a way perhaps no other modern figure can be. I suspect he is less imprisoned and guided by his own bureaucracy than any other modern head of state. And eventually all roads do lead to Rome. Everyone goes there; in comparison, Washington, Vienna, Tokyo, and Nairobi seem like out-of-the-way provincial capitals. Undoubtedly one of the difficulties the papacy constantly encounters is that it knows too much rather than too little when compared with its counterparts. And, as James Hitchcock has recently shown, media criticism of Paul VI often betrays a very "biased" line that fails to take this into account (The Alternative, October, 1976). Just when we've decided Paul hasn't paid enough attention to certain Brazilian theologians, we find that only the day before he had been talking with the Hungarian bishops, an Eastern Rite patriarch, or the president of a Muslim state—and we are not sure how it all fits together.

Certainly, the most noteworthy event of Paul VI's pontificate has been Vatican II, with its whole vast reflection on every aspect of Christian doctrine and life. Even though the closing of Vatican Council II was a mere twelve years ago, the pace of modern life has often made it seem closer to Vatican I or even to Trent. Vatican II was accomplished in an atmosphere of optimism about man and the world, confidence in nature and science, in liberty and human goodness. A decade later we are mostly confirmed pessimists, and the religious problematic has had to face almost the reverse of the problems envisioned by Vatican II on many points. We thought reconciling religious and civil liberties was our main task, admitting authentic spheres of civil and religious cooperation. Now we are startled to discover we have to struggle to keep the secular from becoming a quasi-religion. Indeed, as Walter Kasper has shown, we are engaged by newer political-theological movements in a dogmatic question of the most basic sort:

The medieval disputes between papacy and empire about the libertas ecclesiae must therefore in justice also be regarded as part of the history of the western idea of freedom. It is true that it took the Church itself long enough, until Vatican II in fact, to recognize these consequences clearly and to overcome in principle any Integralism which would seek to impose a potestas directa of the Church in secular spheres....Yet at the present time it is already having to defend this Christologically-based principle against neo-integralist endeavours which, developing certain ideas of the liberal Protestant theology of culture, seek on left-wing lines to make the Church itself form the advance guard of political liberation movements [W. Kasper, Jesus the Christ, 1976].

John Courtney Murray, ironically, is surprisingly out of date for these religious-political movements, which seek to confront economic and social development by joining what had finally been separated. Paul VI, to his credit, has remained quite clear in not confusing religion and politics in this more recent fashion.

For Paul, then, the Church is and conceives itself to be directed to something broader than and different from social, economic, and political issues alone. Indeed, in the sphere of political philosophy the two thousand-year-old Christian tradition has been one of the major reasons why we can deny to the state and the civil order complete control over the soul and body of man—a control in fact, probably exercised more commonly in these past fourteen years and over greater numbers than at any previous time in history. There are simply many things, including the most important, that do not belong to Caesar—even though, and this too is Christian, some things do properly belong to him. A good deal of the drama of politics, even today, consists in the active effort to guarantee this separation by legal, moral, and political means.

Paul VI has generally sensed the tension between the need to speak to the world on moral issues that really trouble it and the fact that the Church is not just another political institution. He told the Papal Diplomatic Corps in January, 1972, for example:

First of all—though this may seem paradoxical to you in view of the function we have claimed for the Church in the international field—we must clearly affirm the Church's distance from political activity as such. The Church's mission is different: it is essentially spiritual. In no way does she indulge in active political action....

In like manner, the Church shuns all violent action, for she takes as her sole model Christ....She aims to persuade with her immeasurable store of hope...knowing that the law of true progress is not revolution, but evolution and transformation. This presupposes a change from within, one whose gains are lasting, for they spring from inner freedom....

....The Church's political aloofness does not entail inaction and disengagement on the part of citizens who are laity faithful to ecclesial life; in particular it does not mean failing to participate in the life of the nation [January 10, 1972].

Such are reflections of basic attitudes that Catholic social thought has held with regard to the primacy of the transcendent over all politics, to the incarnational and service effect of men responsible to one another, to the relation of internal and external freedom and change, to the authentic and necessary participation of Catholics as citizens in the public and civic order where they are living.

When Paul VI came to the papacy, the Roman Church under Pius XII and John XXIII had just produced a series of quite remarkable documents on the economic, social, and political orders. The Christmas addresses of Pius XII from 1953-57 are astonishing in their awareness of the limits and dangers of technology, an issue that has become the very stuff of daily headlines. John's Pacem in Terris (1963) may be the best single brief statement produced in the whole last half century of what government ought to be, of its vocation, nature, and limits.
Moreover, the Council’s two documents on The Church in the Modern World and on Religious Freedom are widely recognized as classic and positive statements of man’s condition and destiny, his place in the public order, his humanity itself. No one seriously concerned about human rights can afford to ignore them.

Thus, Paul VI has been the direct inheritor of these excellent sources, as well as those major efforts of Leo XIII, Benedict XV during World War I, and Pius XI of the depression-totalitarian era of the 1920’s and ‘30’s, many of whose reflections seem, in retrospect, ever more relevant. Pius XI’s famous principle of subsidiarity and its emphasis on small and intermediate technology and institutions are increasingly recognized as essential elements of any developmental economics. At first sight, then, it might seem they left Paul little to contribute. In one sense this is true, as it has been Paul’s emphatic religious principle that his task as pope is precisely to preserve and hand down intact the inherited core of Christian tradition, remaining faithful not merely to John, the Council, and recent popes, but to the very Scriptures themselves. Paul would be totally misjudged were his view of his office seen in any other light. In his coronation address on June 30, 1963, he stated: “We assume [the obligation to perpetuate and spread on Earth the mission of Christ] in the face of the future history of the Church, which expects nothing from us but perfect fidelity to the original mission of the Gospel and to the authentic tradition that springs from it.” Christianity, in this sense, is seen to be more “revolutionary” when it remains itself. One of the basic Christian freedoms is precisely the freedom from the tyranny of the present.

Paul has, however, also forged new paths that make him seem the most radical of men in some ways, the most conservative in others. The reason for this, I surmise, is largely because he has a clear and independent understanding of what is essentially at issue in the modern world, what is important and valuable in it, what is wrong with it. Paul is, in many ways, the least contradictory of men, and for those of us who are more dogmatic believers in the obscurity and the unarrangeability of things, this causes us to misunderstand him, to think him inconsistent and insensitive when he is, in the long view, quite the opposite.

I do not, of course, pretend to make Paul VI “infallible” in the very way Roman dogma specifically defines he is not. But to say he is not infallible on a given opinion does not mean that the opinion is ipso facto wrong. And he is able to speak plainly on profound issues. Witness:

...One of the good fortunes of our era [is] to have redefined this capital distinction between the temporal power and the kingdom of God which the Church embodies, above and beyond the vicissitudes and needs of history which may have led people on either side to certain confusions....

...[But] the Gospel forbids us to be indifferent when the issues at stake are man’s welfare, his physical health, the development of his mind and spirit, his fundamental rights or his spiritual vocation. Nor can we remain neutral when the social circumstances faced by a population jeopardize these values, or when some international institution needs support in order to carry out the humanitarian role that is expected of it [January 11, 1973].

The flack that President Carter has received in a certain kind of European and American press because of his human rights stance is much like the criticism leveled at the Holy See for speaking or not speaking on human rights. The ideologies and philosophies competing for the duty to represent the “highest” in man’s dignity and destiny are many—Christianity has always been one contender, if indeed it did not invent the very idea. Thus, without realizing it, we are perhaps returning to a classical Christian notion.

Paul VI has argued to the modern questions in a surprisingly pertinent fashion. There is, in fact, a rather remarkable reconsideration of the whole scope of modern economic and political life that is rediscovering the central line of modern Catholic social thought (cf. “The Non-Catholic Revival of Modern Catholic Social Thought,” in The Month, a London publication, March, 1977). The curious thing about this phenomenon is that the intellectual terms for its restatement are found, in part, in Paul VI, who has generally rejected tendencies to ideology found in so much recent Catholic social writing.
and, in part, in such writers as E.F. Schumacher, Norman Macrae, Ben Wattenberg, Hermann Kahn, and Buckminster Fuller, who have a much more sensible grip on the basic elements of the potentialities of Earth, the nature of man, and the dead-end street of current ideologies and exploitation theories that have seemed almost required by many Third World and Western philosophies.

Without doubt the great intellectual struggle during the next papacy will be precisely over whether the ideologies can capture the papal center of Catholic social thought as they have captured so much of the peripheries. It is not uncommon in recent years, especially in the French, Italian, and Spanish literature with which Paul is most familiar, to find the major hypothesis of social and political thought to be how to accommodate Christianity to Marxism—rarely is it phrased the other way around. Paul's insistence on the continuity and distinctness of a specifically Christian social and political thought remains one of the marks of real intellectual perception into the issues at hand.

In 1952, when he was still under-secretary of state for Pius XII, Giovanni Montini wrote a letter to the twenty-fifth Catholic Social Week then meeting in Torino. In this letter the then Monsignor Montini wrote: "The economic world is primarily a creation of the free will of men; it pertains to the state, therefore, to create those conditions which may allow private initiative to expand within the limits of the moral order and of the common good." I was reminded of this passage recently in connection with several essays published in L'Osservatore Romano (March 26, 1977) on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the publication of Populorum Progressio, probably Paul's most famous social document. Populorum Progressio, as is well known, was directed to the problem of the development of peoples, how to bring the poor and weak of the world into the mainstream of modern life. This was a pioneer manifesto that has become more reasonable with each passing year. It served, along with John XXIII's Mater et Magistra (1961), to define the crucial problem of our time as that related to the poor members of the human family, their political, economic, religious, cultural, and moral status and stature. In a message to the U.N. secretary general in 1974 Paul VI repeated the substance of his initial document:

...We feel constrained to state once again that the giving of aid—however laudable and necessary—is not sufficient to promote the full measure of human dignity required by the solidarity of mankind under the fatherhood of God. The nations must succeed in creating new, more just, and hence more effective international structures in such spheres as economics, trade, industrial development, finance and the transfer of technology [April 4, 1974].

In a sense this concern for proper political and economic structures on the international level carries into a broader field a kind of thinking strongly stressed in the nation-state field by Pius XI in Quadragesimo Anno (1931). Populorum Progressio even restressed the traditional "right to revolution" in extreme cases that had been long a part of Catholic political philosophy with Aquinas, Mariana, and Suarez. Yet Paul remains skeptical of the universal feasibility of revolution as a solution.

Roger Heckel is right to recall, ten years after Populorum Progressio, that Paul's original appeal was primarily to the rich of the world to come to the aid of the poor. The remarkable thing that has happened in the meantime is that the poor have discovered they must take the initiative that Giovanni Montini spoke of in 1952 and that he reemphasized in Populorum Progressio: "[Each person] is aided, or sometimes impeded, by those who educate him and those with whom he lives, but each one remains, whatever be these influences affecting him, the principal agent of his own success or failure." The proposals and demands for a new economic order, often poorly conceived or even harmful to the real interests of the poor, come with much more force from the poor than from the rich nations.

One of the major problems in economics and politics has always been that of "initial. How do we incite human beings to act, at least in their own self-interest, if not, preferably, in the interests of others as well? In what may be one of the more encouraging signs of our times, new initiatives do seem to be taking shape in many parts of the Third World. In this context Roger Heckel wrote:

The Church cannot but rejoice to see that poor nations take the initiative and retake for themselves...a greater part of the power and responsibility for their development and for the construction of a new world order. There is in this a reserve of new energy which can contribute in large measure to reorient world economy to the satisfaction of real needs while too often this is stimulated by artificial needs and deviates into irresponsible waste [L'Osservatore Romano, March 26, 1977].

One of the basic themes of Catholic social thought is rooted in this mysterious dynamism of the human being who can, out of his own resources and freedom, change the world. "The theme of self-confidence," Heckel continued, "recalls in large measure the papal teaching about people 'being architects of their own development.'" This sense of the importance of "initiatives," of course, is the net result and consequence of the notion of "personhood," which Paul VI, as all modern popes, has seen to be the basis of all social and religious philosophy.

Indeed, the concept and reality of "person"—a theological and political theme forged in early trinitarian reflections—is basic to Christian thought and has been rethought in modern times by Maritain and other philosophers with whom Giovanni Montini was most familiar. This personalism is what unifies the stands and strands of Paul VI's public policies and his theological explanations of them. For it is the Christian belief and metaphysics of "person" that
decides its view toward human rights, war, religious liberty, family, population, economic development, civil society, and its rejection of ideology. It is because of the intrinsic and transcendent value of each person conceived and born into this world—real persons, not abstractions—that Catholic social thought takes the definite shape it does. This is what judges all social and political forms and institutions, limits the state, and defines how men are to relate and deal with one another.

Thus, at the canonization of an obscure Spanish nun, Teresa Jornet Ibara, whom Paul called a saint for the "aged and lonely," he noted something that must be taken as fundamental to understanding any Christian view of personhood:

You [speaking of the old] have been chosen by God to reaffirm before the world life's sacred dimension; with your work, which is inspired by the Gospel spirit and not by mere calculations of human efficiency or convenience, you repeat to society man can never be considered merely as an instrument of profit or from the standpoint of a cold utilitarianism but that he is ontologically sacred because he is God's son and always deserves every consideration because he has an eternal destiny [January 27, 1974].

This constant return to the crucial place reserved to the innocent, the weak, the young, the sick, the isolated, the aged, the deprived—in short, to the kinds of people there are among us, never letting the metaphysics of group or race or class or nature replace the irreplaceable individual—this is the vocation Paul VI has carved out for himself.

Beginning with the human person, with the meaning of human life in all its physical and spiritual aspects, Paul has seen himself as spokesman for those who do not have a voice. His New Year's address of 1977 was called "If You Want Peace, Defend Life." This is why he has refused to believe that the reason for poverty in the world is due to the earth's natural deficiencies or to the belief that many lives must be relinquished without help so the rest can be saved (triage). In this, he has struck a surprisingly responsive accord in many Third World peoples who do not believe their plight is due primarily to themselves or to their children or to deficiencies of the planet. Indeed, the recent defeat of Mrs. Gandhi (and the importance that a general distaste for her sterilization policy had in it) would confirm Paul's suspicion that he has been on the right track all along in defending human right and life, while questioning the political values and policies that seem to minimize or destroy it, especially in its most innocent form. In *Humanae Vitae* (1968), his most controversial encyclical, Paul argued:

No one can, without being grossly unfair, make divine providence responsible for what clearly seems to be the result of misguided governmental policies, of an insufficient sense of social justice, of a selfish accumulation of material goods, and finally of a culpable failure to undertake those initiatives and responsibilities which would raise the standard of living of peoples and their children.

In Paul there is this dogged sense of placing human freedom and value directly at the center of the issue and not allowing any escape into a determinist alternative.

In this connection, moreover, it is instructive to come across an unfortunate and, if compared, say, to Herman Kahn's *The Next 200 Years*—an uninformative article by the usually perceptive C.L. Sulzberger:

Starting from opposite ideological poles, both Marxist and Roman Catholic teaching discourages population control. The Marxists contend that were the earth's resources properly used there would be no limit to the population it could support—although it will have 13 billion inhabitants a century hence. And the Vatican is opposed to any artificial means seeking to limit birth [Herald Tribune. Paris. April 11. 1977].

The problems with this kind of comment are several. It attributes to Marxism what has been the classic Judeo-Christian position from the beginning, something Marxism merely accepted. Then, too, Marxism is a theory of social structure, which is where it diverges from Christianity. But, most seriously, it reduces the wide-ranging reflections of the Vatican, of Paul, to a very narrow issue that is almost a parody when so treated. Indeed, any attention to population literature in recent years will show that most of it has shifted from a position of voluntarism to coercion, holding that "artificial means" will not do the trick in any case. In retrospect, Paul VI was quite right in suspecting that abortion would in fact become the main issue and the primary population-control means. The public issue today is not birth control but abortion—what is human life? when does it begin? who has the right to touch it?

Kahn, Wattenberg, Macrae, Fuller, and others argue that the vast potentialities of the Earth and our solar system make any position like Sulzberger's manifestly conservative by comparison. Within a century we are going to have a world population of seven to twenty billion, a population better off by at least as much as we are better off than people were a hundred years ago—provided we do not romanticize the situation of a hundred years ago. The real problem of Western European and American people—and this is what is ultimately behind much of the current worry about immigration—will be their rapid and relative decline as a percentage of world population.

In this context Mr. Sulzberger argued that for developed countries to urge population control on others is not "colonialist" but "common sense." On this issue Paul VI has proved himself to be more scientific, more "Marxist" if you will, more "anticolonialist" than we in the West are likely to understand. Paul VI has created, for almost the first time in history, a constituency for the papacy outside the West. Thus, Paul told the World Food Conference in 1974:

The real need, in the last analysis, is to acknowledge in an effective way, the right of every human being to
eat his fill as required of his age and the kind of activity he engages in. This right is based on the fact that all earthly goods are intended first and foremost for the use of mankind as a whole and the maintenance of all men, and only secondarily for the private appropriation of the individual....

...We cannot allow those who control the goods and resources of mankind to resolve the problem of hunger by forbidding the birth of the poor or letting children die of starvation simply because their parents have not acted in accordance with the theoretical plans based on pure hypotheses about the future of mankind. In a past which we had hoped was gone forever, men went to war in order to seize their neighbors’ wealth. But is it not simply a new form of war when some nations try to impose restrictive demographic policies on others so that the latter may not claim their just share of the earth’s fruits?

Paul VI, I suspect, will continue to call it “colonialism” and not “common sense,” especially when he reads a headline like this one in the Santa Cruz, California, Sentinel (July 17, 1977): “THREE YEARS LATER, U.S. WHEAT INVENTORY IS NOW IMMENSE.”

To be sure. Paul’s position on birth control caused considerable confusion, controversy, and doubt in the Church. The debate between those who feel it is a neutral issue and not “common sense,” especially when he reads a headline like this one in the Santa Cruz, California, Sentinel (July 17, 1977): “THREE YEARS LATER, U.S. WHEAT INVENTORY IS NOW IMMENSE.”

Yet, just when we’ve decided that Paul VI has all the theoretical premises for a rapprochement with Marxism—he has tried in his so-called Ostpolitik to normalize relations with Eastern European Marxist powers—and with the Third World radicals who argue that the latter’s ills are caused by the rich, we find Paul traveling to Bogota, Colombia, where he again reveals the kind of moral courage in the face of contrary opinion that one has to admire in the man:

Many, especially the young, insist on the need for urgent change in social structures, structures which, they say, do not allow the attainment of a real condition of justice for individuals and the community: and some conclude that Latin America’s essential problem can be solved only by violence.

With the same sincerity with which we recognize that such theories and practices often find their ultimate motivation in noble impulses of justice and solidarity, we must say and reaffirm that violence is not in accordance with the Gospel, that it is not Christian; and that sudden or violent changes of structures would be deceitful, would be ineffective of themselves, and certainly would not be in conformity with the dignity of the people. That dignity demands that needed changes be realized from within...[August 23, 1968].

Ever since his famous address to the United Nations General Assembly on the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, 1965, Paul VI has spoken constantly to the nations of peace—’’No more war—ever again!’’—and its social and political presuppositions. He has spoken in the context of the papacy as an historical office and its vocation to remind men that war is not necessary, that it diverts them from their real tasks. Paul has been, however, a pragmatic pope in this sense, as his second great social letter, Octagesima Adveniens (1971) indicated (cf. this author’s “The Pragmatic Encyclical,” Worldview, Summer, 1971). He has been skeptical of the claims of ideology of every sort, aware of the Christian belief in original and actual sin, which leads him to expect that men will not perform as well as their theories predict. In this context, he has been the first pope seriously to criticize labor unions as a major problem in the common good of society. On the other hand, Paul also has remained faithful to that other side of particularly Catholic doctrine, which, while admitting the undeniable reality of sin and evil, is still able to expect and demand that men rise to the higher norms of justice, peace, and charity to which they are concretely and certainly called.

If we are to make a just estimate of Paul VI, we must do so not only in the context of the truly remarkable and almost encyclopedic range of subjects he has covered, but also and primarily in the context of his capacity to see that all social issues are interconnected and dependent on man’s ultimate meaning. Of late, many people are increasingly concerned that Paul does not exercise his authority forcefully enough, that the Church is drifting because he is too easy, drifting to the left (cf. George Kelly, “An Uncertain Church,” The Critic, Fall, 1976). He raps a Bishop Lefebvre but ignores the Christian Marxist. On the other side, I want to cite a recent comment by Charles Fager, in speaking of E. F. Schumacher, that strikes me as coming pretty close also to the mentality of Paul VI—indeed, both Paul and Schumacher seem “formed,” as it were, by the same authors:

Schumacher himself insists that it is this “meta-economic” foundation of his argument that is most important...”Everywhere people ask, ’’ he writes in the book’s final paragraph, “’What can I actually do?’” The answer is as simple as it is disconcerting: we can, each of us, work to put our own inner house in order.” The key word here is “inner.”... This “inner” part was what I wanted to talk to him about. He readily owned up to being a Catholic, a certified convert as of five years ago...But it wasn’t this chapter [on “Buddhist Economics” in Small Is Beautiful], I inquired, really more informed by the Catholic writings and thinkers he mentioned so frequently elsewhere in the book—the papal encyclicals, Newman, Gilson and, above all, Thomas Aquinas?

Schumacher grinned. “Of course. But if I had called the chapter “Christian Economics,” nobody would have paid any attention.”

Schumacher agreed with this catalogue of thinkers as sources for his own outlook. In keeping with their
Paul probably does not know Schumacher—though he is a first-class candidate for the Vatican's Justice and Peace Commission—but both have this sense of realizing that external social and economic structures are rooted in our attitude to life, society, one another, and, yes, to God.

Of course, we should not expect a pope not to be a religious leader. (Here I leave aside, to be sure, the problems of a Julius II or a Benedict IX.) Nor should we expect that a pope will not see man's spiritual well-being and meaning to be determinative of how man fares in the world and beyond. That man is not faring well seems to be the message of our era, and this we have from impeccable secular sources. Indeed, Paul VI has often returned to the pessimism of the literature of our time with some astonishment:

Perhaps never before, as much as in our day, have literature, the theater, art and philosophical thought borne more merciless witness to man's deficiency, his mental debility, his domination by sensuality, his moral hypocrisy, his facile delinquency, his increasing cruelty, his possible abusement, his inconsistent personality. All complacent accusations are based on a terrible and seemingly irrefutable argument: Such is man, such is the great and miserable son of this century. This is the true reality of life [December 20, 1968].

Thus Paul, when he zeros in on the whole, begins with the special and inviolable meaning of man—and it is this according to which he judges nature and society, man in his concert life, that of real persons and families. "Today man's awareness of justice is moving forward. No one...disputes this phenomenon.... All human beings today have a new awareness of themselves. Every human being knows that he is a person, and feels himself to be such. That is, he considers himself inviolable, equal to others, free and responsible. We would even say: he feels he is sacred" (December 8, 1971). Paul would have no doubt about the sacredness of the human person, even knowing what he does about the depths to which man can sometimes descend.

That this sense of personhood and sacredness is more than living a good and productive life is the primary thing a pope has to tell mankind. Indeed this may be, as Schumacher hinted, the most important thing Christianity has to say to the social order of men. Paul himself can state this in an academic fashion, as to the Synod of Bishops on New Year's day, 1975:

...Salvation in its entirety is not to be confused with and limited to one or other kind of liberation. We must see to it that the real point of the Gospel message is kept unchanged, namely, that God redeems man from sin and death and leads him to participate in the divine life. Consequently, man's temporal and social progress is not to be so emphasized that we lose sight of the essential meaning which the Church gives to the Evangelization or the preaching of the Gospel in its entirety.

Or he can state it very simply, as to the people in the Tondo slum area, when he was in 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.

There is much also that reminds us of Solzhenitsyn in such remarks. What I find especially impressive about them is this sense of seeing the ultimate destiny of each person, his particular dignity, whether we in this world manage to improve his lot or not. From the viewpoint of the public order of the world, we must realize that for many we have indeed failed. That some future earthly society may be better for others after us (it may be worse too) does not excuse a pope from paying attention to the ultimate value of the people who actually exist, no matter how poor or humble or unknown they might be.

Paul, finally, has been able to grant what must be granted to the world and its hopes. He has done so enthusiastically and in terms far more liberal than was anticipated. Yet he has continued to keep the central Christian belief before our eyes, whether we have liked it or not, the belief that prevents us from making of this sometimes lovely, ever passing world an absolute. That man is grounded in a vision beyond his own making is the freedom that gives him personhood and rights, that prevents man as an individual from exhausting his destiny in the movements and analyses of our time. In keeping this before us, Paul VI has revealed a comprehension of the whole scope of metaphysical and social philosophy far beyond anything we might justly expect even of a pope.