

Series Five—1974

RETURNS SUGGEST THAT CHANGES PROPOSED BY PAUL IN 1970 ARE REJECTED BY CATHOLIC AND NON-CATHOLIC CHURCHMEN

“Extremely negative”—this is the nature of the responses so far received to Paul’s earlier probings, begun in 1970, when he made his first tentative public overture at abdication, tied to his pet reforms.

Many responding point out that, if Paul’s ideas are adopted, the Pope will become the equivalent of the elected chairman of the Roman Catholic Episcopal, Inc. And that, in effect, would only place the Roman Church in the same helpless position in which the Anglican and Episcopal Churches find themselves today.

Others observe that the very system Paul now proposes has already paralyzed the Eastern Orthodox Churches—Greek and Russian. Those Churches have failed to expand. They have become nothing more than national Churches. They have not healed the differences between themselves and other Christians. And most of them have sunk into a ghetto of their own ossified traditions.

The Internationalists—those who earnestly want a non-Italian Pope—object that, in all probability, in Paul’s new system the Pope would always be an Italian. Maybe he would be a very honored and honorable member of an international board of Bishops. But his chief title would still be Bishop of Rome—and, for all its glory, Rome is and always will be an Italian diocese. Just as the Bishop of a French diocese should be French and the Bishop of a German diocese should be German, so the Bishop of Rome will be an Italian. Now, the Internationalists add,

no Italian Pope has ever made the Vatican truly international—opening out the “Roman Club” to others. The last Pope to promise to do that was Martin 5. But once he was actually elected in 1417, he concentrated more power than ever in Rome. So the Internationalists see the whole proposal as a trap.

The response to Paul’s proposal from various governments is also negative. General Franco of Spain, right-wing regimes in Latin America, the United States Government: none wants to see local Bishops have autonomy, and thus be placed beyond the control and veto of the Vatican when it comes, for example, to hairline election battles between Communists and non-Communists, both in Europe and in Latin America.

In spite of the fact that his Papal policies do not seem to go well—or perhaps because of that—speculation never dies that Pope Paul will resign. Most Cardinal Electors still have their eyes fixed on September 26, 1977, Paul’s 80th birthday. But when Paul made his rule excluding 80-year-old Cardinals from Conclave, he had no thought of himself at 80. He thought only to exclude the core of the Traditionalist old guard in the Vatican from any direct influence on the future of the Church.

MORE PAPABILI BEGIN TO EMERGE; FACTIONS DEVELOP

For the moment, under the prodding and persuasion of the powerful Bishop of Marseilles, Roger Etchegaray, the French Cardinals and their foreign friends have rallied around the figure of a German Cardinal as a prime pan-European candidate, one who is in favor of slow, gradual change.

There is another group of Electors who are seeking a Third World candidate. Their choice would be somebody who is a true Progressivist, and in favor of a totally “open” Church; easing up on all the official differences maintained between Catholics and other Christians; adaptation of all Church activity—theology, liturgy, piety, social performance—to modern conditions; cultivation of Marxists as people trying to effect suitable changes in the regimen of nations and individuals.

The Italians are slowly splitting up into three groups:

the Conservatives (who advocate slow, gradual change—but change); the Traditionalists (who want a strong reassertion of all pre-Vatican Council II Church beliefs and practices); and the Radicals.

The Radicals decry both Conservatives and Progressivists as two sides of the same coin. They accuse both of them of advocating no initiative specific to the Catholic Church, but of merely allowing themselves to be pushed—whether slowly (the Conservatives) or at breakneck speed (the Progressivists)—by outside events and interests. The Radicals accuse the Traditionalists of being out of touch, of trying to set the clock back, and of being blind to the vast change that has taken place already.

The Radicals would uproot the entire system of Church government and religious activity—all that savors of a former age when the Church was immersed in politics and wielding temporal power. They would repair the damage done since the Vatican Council by the liberal Progressivists—especially in doctrine and Liturgy. They would oppose the slow changes of the Conservatives as being merely pale, hesitating imitations of the Progressivists. But they would not try to restore the old order of things—as the Traditionalists often seem to wish to do.