

25. The Millennium Endgame

Thus, before the onset of a new spring in 1990, all the patterns were formed and set for the conduct of the affairs of nations in the foreseeable future. Now, in these trailing times of the second millennium, the long-standing game of winner-take-all between the two superpowers and their partisans had to all intents and purposes ceased; their great and decisive endgame had begun in earnest.

Everywhere, as John Paul had analyzed the situation, one whole generation passed away, another was born and grew past maturity, and a third had just been born, during the global winner-take-all game. It was a seesaw contest or, if you will, a tug-of-war initiated by the utopian dreams of a Lenin and a Stalin, fomented by their henchmen in many lands, and animated by the principle of fratricide. "We will bury you," Nikita Khrushchev had screamed, pounding his desk at the United Nations with his shoe.

For close on seventy years, the well-being and progress as well as the suffering and difficulties of all nations have been gridded on the seesawing patterns traced by the varying fortunes of the two superpowers. The West stood for certain basic values: free enterprise, free markets, free trade, all housed in free political institutions; the primacy of the individual socially, economically, politically; the creation of wealth, not its mere distribution or redistribution, as the goal of the economic order. Still one other value ruled the American mind in particular: a sense of its responsibility as the only power capable of engaging in that tug-of-war, the only power capable of outweighing the Soviet adversary.

Ensuring peace overall was defined strictly in terms of a fratricidal enemy. Peace was the capacity to discourage the enemy's lethal wishes. Each side aimed at outweighing the other on the seesaw. But neither

actually succeeded, because neither successfully straddled the center and controlled the two ends. One way or another, all the strains and stresses undergone by the nations, as well as their successes and sureties, resulted from the back-and-forth veering victories in the relentless tug-of-war between those two giant contestants, who were bent, each one of them, on eventually hauling the other, kicking and contentious but captive, over into its own terrain.

That is all those generations had known. Theirs had been a world of dangerous seesaw, of the lethal tug-of-war. The value and the safety of their lives as nations came to be measured along that great divide between the two contestants.

Among the successive waves of Cold War, thaw and détente, there ran the flummery of never-ending disarmament talks; the mutual recriminations; the occasional bloodletting; the regularly occurring "tit-for-tat" expulsions of diplomats for "undiplomatic behavior" because the other side had done just that; the horrid "sideshows" in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Namibia, Ethiopia; and, hanging over all this, the fear of sudden nuclear holocaust.

As a cap on this wearing-down process, there was the constant pressure on all nations to make a choice, to take a side between sides, or to remain neutral—which each side labeled as a covert taking of the other side. Hence those horrid coordinates "East-West" and "North-South," which John Paul excoriated. It was the worst of times—so much so that the best consolation offered was that at least World War III was being avoided. "We haven't had a major world war for over forty years," was the comment. As if that was the best man could hope for.

Quite recently and quite suddenly, this wasting global game ended. Unbelievably, but actually, it ended. There was no longer any counterweight on the seesaw, any tension in the tug-of-war. Nobody could explain precisely why to everybody's satisfaction. Reasoning and fancy vied to explain the sudden change.

Whatever the driving power behind the sudden change, one main fact is clear:

The two main contenders have decided to converge; to seek out, identify and enlarge every possible area of cooperation, collaboration and sharing; to excise all the hardened warts of hate and distrust that have marred the faces they displayed between them; to create trust by opening up to each other their parliamentary processes, their defense and strategic measures; to establish a unity of purpose and of action in various scientific and humanitarian sectors; to introduce among their peoples ways of living, of learning, of understanding and of judging that cannot be tagged as either typically American or typically Soviet or Russian but

will merit being described as human and common to both. For only thus can you understand what is being said by the leadership on both sides of the fence today.

The decision to seek that convergence and the concrete steps already taken in that direction do outline the basic character of this new game of nations: There are to be moves by one nation, then follow-up moves by the other nation. Then the creation of new mutual relationships and forces, enabling and evoking further moves on every player's part; and all this purposefully aimed at achieving convergence. Every time a forward step is taken, the foot must land on a square of already confirmed trust. President Ronald Reagan's publicly announced principle of his trust in Mikhail Gorbachev has been elevated to a universal principle: "Trust, but verify." On both sides.

Clearly, this also is an endgame. Not so much because its beginning marks the end of the winner-take-all game that racked the society of nations for two generations. Principally because, in this new game, the nations are writing a definitive coda to what they have been as a society for most of this now-ending second millennium.

Its end, barely ten years away, will signal a farewell to a nation system of human society that, in its worst paroxysms, had almost decided to commit suicide—by wholesale industrial slaughter of millions of human beings or in a nuclear oven—and, at its very best, enabled the nations to put up with the soul-deadening boredom of perpetual contention because some tasted sweet victory and the rest lived on the hope of victory—as if that were the best man could do for man.

But there are, in high places, no illusions about the nature of this endgame. The heart of it lies in competition. It is still a winner-take-all arrangement. The West has renounced none of the basic values it has defended and propagated for the last seventy years. The Soviet East has not renounced its utopian goal; but, under the pressure of unchangeable circumstances, the leadership has decided to adopt a different way to that goal. They both have agreed to conditions that mean, in effect, that either one or the other will predominate finally and will finally bury the other without the horrors of a shooting war. The Gramscian conversion of Leninism preserves the burning core of Leninism.

There is not one normally aware and normally well-informed member in the various power centers and interest lobbies of "East" and "West" who has not recognized the terminal effect of this endgame, although few can readily imagine that planned society of nations in which the present accepted differences that mark all nations are eliminated. And some find it frightening, even appalling. Nobody expects a world order to evolve that will, as an optimist might say, combine the best of Lenin-

ism and capitalism. Neither a "Leninized" capitalism nor a capitalistic version of Leninism is possible. Neither does anyone know for sure the factors that hastened the end of the old game and, in a certain true sense, imposed the endgame with such ease and with such rapidity, dictating the new rules, even fixing the timetable. The endgame follows a new calendar.

Everyone recognizes one salient fact: This sudden, apparently benign changeover started almost simultaneously with the accession of Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev to the leading position of power in the USSR and with his meteoric ascendance as the dominant personality and the primary catalyst of international life.

From the beginning of his pontificate, John Paul has been talking incessantly about the convergence of the nations. He had the endgame in view some ten years before other men faced into it; and, for his pains, he has been seen by many in the West as a man of the East, and by many in the East as a man of the West. Deterred in no way by such misunderstanding, John Paul hinged the success of his pontificate on what was and still remains a gamble concerning the present endgame. He would endow his papacy with an international profile and, as Pope, move around among world leaders and nations, vindicating a position for himself as a special leader among leaders, because in that competition he plans to emerge as the victor.

He did accomplish his immediate aim. The papal profile of high international definition was achieved. It was the first step in his gamble. The second step has been more hazardous but is intimately linked with the first. The gargantuan effort he has put forth on the international plane has not been even half matched on his part by an effort at halting the year-by-year deterioration of his Church structure. There has been no genuine policy of reversing the shame of his Church today; namely, the slow but sure transmogrification of that Catholic structure into a most un-Catholic thing, a misshapen, limping, scar-ridden and diseased version of what it was twenty-five years ago.

His energies, his interests, his time and his talents have been almost exclusively preoccupied with the endgame. And, now that it has started in earnest, more than ever his concentration is focused on the emerging patterns and on the master magician Mikhail Gorbachev. For John Paul's gamble is riding on the back of Gorbachevism.

That endgame, into which Gorbachevism has forced everybody to enter, came as a relief for the generality of people everywhere.

In the "West," where men and women have grown weary of soul in the ceaseless rounds of tensions, thaws, rearmament, armed clashes and

endless fears. In the East, where every promise of Leninist Marxism has been fulfilled by its direct opposite—imprisonment of mind and body instead of freedom, hunger instead of plenty, dismal backwardness instead of progress, inefficiency instead of high efficiency, privilege-ridden society instead of equality, hopelessness instead of hope.

In the now not so Far East, whose food, languages, religions, wars, refugees have become daily news fare for Mrs. Calabash, wherever she is. In the Western Hemisphere, where, up north, men and women are finally getting tired on their treadmill as it aims ceaselessly to produce a better mouse trap; and where, down south, men and women are beginning to suspect that there is no humanly acceptable exit from the swamps of economic helplessness and inept nationalisms. The miserable of the world now know how the "other half" lives; and the "other half" has not only lost its energy, it is caught in its own rhetoric of challenge.

This mass of spiraling strains had to end; and while the start of the endgame was a surprise, men and women everywhere are taking it in their stride. It is as if they know there had to be some way out of the one-way street into which they had been hemmed by the Leninist process and by that process of the Wise Men of the West, the amoral tomfoolery of raw capitalism as it played with the human environment and with the lives of helpless millions in the Third World, who cut themselves off from the sustenance of their old traditions because they had been led by hollow hopes and false promises to commit themselves to the new gods of economic expediency.

For quite a while now, and for quite an appreciable time before Gorbachevism became the catalyst within international affairs, John Paul has resolutely faced into the inevitable happenings and accompaniments of the endgame.

Certainly, the formerly segregated society of nations dubbed the "East" is being penetrated by the technology, the business know-how, the managerial skills of the "West," together with the garish panoply of symbols announcing the goodness of the Big Mac, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Nestlé chocolate, French champagne, Italian clothes and wine, and German do-it-yourself over-the-counter drugs.

But the penetration of the West by the East, while it will include some choice consumer goods, and some panoply of the East's symbols of the good life (no doubt adapted to American and European tastes), will be of a more profound kind. It will take place on the level where culture and the human spirit intermingle, and where human sensibilities are molded

through the silent operation of basic ideas and judgments about the human condition. For this penetration is to be accomplished by the planned convergence of minds and wills.

The West, already profoundly secularized, is going to converge on that all-important level with minds and cultures already impregnated with the officially nourished secularism of the Leninist homeland, and—this much all can be sure of—under the watchful surveillance, the skillful manipulation and the expert monitoring of the Party-State. It would be foolish on the part of any statesman or politician in Europe of the 1990s, with Gorbachevism in full swing, not to realize and act according to the fact that political penetration and control of Europe in its continental institutions as well as in its state-by-state legislatures is the key aim of Gorbachevism. John Paul must now assist at that Soviet penetration and control, and be helpless to prevent it. The ghost of Gramsci will flit triumphantly over the Marxization of European political culture and its first continental institutions.

For John Paul could predict, as early as 1988, that the Eurocommunist parties of Europe (Italy's, France's, Spain's, Germany's, Belgium's) will be accepted and granted equal status in the EEC as well as in the other European institutions. With the birth of political alliances between Communists and Socialists on national levels, the European Parliament would be a reality. Under the Gorbachevist "liberalization" plans for the Soviet Eastern European satellites, and because of his 1989 proposition (he did not request; he proposed) that at least those Eastern nations, if not the Soviet Union itself, be admitted to the "common European home," Europe from the Atlantic—or at least from Calais on the English Channel—to the Russian Urals would in a short time be a socialist Europe, whose legislators owed ultimate allegiance to the Soviet Union and whose executive, legislative and judicial functions would be occupied by men and women of the same ideological brand. When Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou announced on July 28, 1989, that "our Socialist party and the Left [the Communists] must have the opportunity to govern the country democratically, progressively and patriotically," he was wisely reading the writing on the wall that told how Greek politics and Europolitics would go.

This planned penetration of Europolitics will go hand in hand with the Moscow-controlled "liberalization" and "democratization" within the Soviet satellites. Both "liberalization" and "democratization" will be introduced through the Communist parties, through the cooperation of particular individuals who are already "deep" Soviet plants in supposedly anti-Soviet bodies, and through the clandestine plans of the KGB. Any apparent "liberalization" and "democratization" within the Soviet Union

itself will be vehicled by the same means—all the state institutions coordinated by the KGB.

John Paul, as well as some others, has learned that Western statesmen, politicians, analysts and thinkers find it almost impossible to imagine that dissident movements such as the 1968 Alexander Dubcek movement in Czechoslovakia, the Solidarity and KOR movements in Poland of the eighties, the Sakharov and other Russian dissident movements within the Soviet Union, have always been and still are shaped, guided and controlled by the CP apparatus. Very few moderns in the West are acquainted with the thoroughness that has always characterized the Leninist process.

John Paul, as of 1988, therefore, has had to live with the knowledge that both the United States and Western Europe are now caught in the beginnings of a political embrace whose only purpose is to control them both, and thus make inevitable the harnessing of their economic power to consolidate a veritable Leninist empire.

The third step in the papal gamble involves, of course, Gorbachev and his USSR, but not as the key element.

That is the mystery of divine providence, in which John Paul firmly believes and on which the brilliant success or the miserable failure of his papal gamble totally depends. Practically considered, the success of his papal participation in the endgame depends on an event whose timing and occasion he is powerless to determine, and the nature of which he cannot in any way influence or fashion. Without that event, he will be impotent just at the height of the endgame. Backed up by that event, he cannot but emerge as the most powerful man alive in his time.

But the price he has to pay is full of bitterness for him.

From the point of view of strict Roman Catholicism, it is a bleak outlook in the short run. The bulk of Churchmen (bishops, priests, cardinals) and vast masses of the laity in Europe and on the North American continent are already alienated from that strict Catholicism, calling themselves "Catholics without the Roman" and members of the "Church without the Pope." The anti-Church, John Paul's direct enemies within or without the Catholic fold, have developed a specifically Roman Catholic secularism, which will now enjoy a fresh fillip in the direction of an ever-greater panreligious feeling and mode of behavior. The "supermarket" (pick 'n' choose) Catholicism fostered or permitted by so many Churchmen, the "ecumenical" (all religions come to the same thing) egalitarianism of so many more, the blunted edge of Catholic education, the antipapalism of bishops and theologians—all of this

provides an open and ready seedbed for the planting of a new and more thorough abandonment of Catholic essentials. And this situation, for the moment irremediable in John Paul's estimation, will provide him with more frustration and annoyance than he could ever have bargained for.

For the moment, and until the new secularism registers some signal victories, the neo-Catholicism of the anti-Church will mingle with and not be clearly—and deliberately—separated and distinguished from the pockets of genuine traditional Catholicism. For authenticity is still sought by the anti-Church, Catholic authenticity. They want to appropriate the entire legacy of Rome. But inevitably the two will separate when the penetration is consummated.

John Paul's Catholics, in that consummation, face the real possibility that for the first time since A.D. 315—1,675 years ago—their genuine Catholicism will lose all its precious footholds in the Western civilization it created and in all the cultures it brought forth in the nourishing and protective shade of that once mighty tree of apostolic and Catholic Christianity. It is now possible that the Roman Catholic Church in its Catholicism will become a socially negligible and a politically invisible entity; that it will become a cultural pariah as indeed it was for the first three hundred years of its existence.

The endgame par excellence.

The anomaly of the millennium will be provided by the sole figure of John Paul. His high international profile still invulnerable to the anti-Church, he will still hold the Keys of that Blood as the enviable source of unique authority, and on his back will rest the hope and guarantee Christ once and for all time made to Peter in a deserted spot near the Roman town of Caesarea Philippi in ancient Judea.

Not only are calm nerves of steel needed to play such a role, and not only must he have an unbreakable grasp on the intangibles of faith preserved in profound tranquillity. He must be clear in his own mind, must have thought it all through to the end, not in a series of abstract concepts but within a programmatic vision inwoven with the Tree of Good and Evil man once ate of, the death cry of the Man God on Calvary, the terrible raid on humanity by the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, and the ecstatic song of the thousands destined from all eternity to eat at the Banquet of the Lamb in the final Kingdom.

If his contemporary generation of men and women realized how fitted and equipped this one man, this Polish Pope, has been in order to have that vision and fulfill this role, they would already be blessing their destiny to live these Catholic times with him. A later and wiser generation surely will venerate him as his contemporaries have never dreamed of doing. For his is the vision. For his is that role, as Servant of the Grand Design.