

Part Two

The Lay of the Land

6. The Morality of Nations: Whatever Happened to Sinful Structures?

The competition into which Pope John Paul II has entered, and upon which he appears to have staked everything, was fired by two great booster engines of modern vintage, and largely of American invention, that have already lifted the entire world into a new orbit of human activity and values.

The first booster engine was the helter-skelter global rush to material development, a factor that never before operated among all the nations of the world simultaneously.

That first engine fired the second: a genuinely global entrepreneurship that, once ignited, has worked in steady tandem with the first to create the conditions that are propelling the world into a single geopolitical community.

The firing up of the first engine—that rush to material development—was made possible by the worldwide economic-financial hegemony of the United States in the years immediately following World War II. And the force that fired it was the celebrated technological creativity of Americans.

Once scientific technology was harnessed to American entrepreneurship, the first test orbit into the atmosphere of the good life was successfully achieved. More and better things were produced for every sector of life: for the home, the company, the city, the state, the federal government. American innovations in everything from basic home appliances to convenience and luxury goods, and from agricultural methods to military equipment—not to mention the manufacturing and management systems that were produced along the way—developed a post-

war culture that very soon became the envy and the objective of other nations.

In the world of the early 1900s, such development might have remained very much indigenous to the North American continent. In the postwar world, it could not. The United States was rebuilding Europe and Japan. The American dollar anchored local currencies around the world, and whatever kind of international monetary system prevailed. The United Nations, itself headquartered in the United States, brought new nations out of their ancient cultures and into newly born but materially backward nationalisms.

"The world," said Winston Churchill in 1954—not ten years after the end of World War II—"has grown frighteningly small in compass; and astride it stands the American colossus, whose strength and girth none can match, but whose clothes we all wish to wear."

The primary purpose of the United States in its technological drive and in its entrepreneurship was economic and financial. The business of America, just as Calvin Coolidge had said in 1929, was still business—balanced budgets; bottom lines in very black ink; a sound dollar.

Such a primary drive had been at work in the U.S.A. since its founding. The culture of Americans—both as a mosaic of immigrant cultures and as a singularly American creation—grew and adapted itself to the quick transformations that changed the quality of life in the nation from 1900 onward. But it was the immense growth and progress of American industrialization, triggered by World War II and by postwar American entrepreneurship, that brought the United States uninterruptedly and without any jarring changes to the threshold of the technotronic era.

By 1960, the American "pursuit of happiness" was concretized in the attainment of the "good life." And "good" referred primarily to life made easy, leisurely and materially pleasurable. It referred to the quality of life that could be achieved with the introduction of modern technological inventions for the individual, the family, the company, the city, the state and the nation. It was much more than "two chickens in every pot and a car in every garage." There was a profound change in the moral quality of American life.

By 1960, as well—and largely because the U.S.A. was so deeply involved in the postwar rebuilding of Europe and Japan—the drive for material development had been jump-started in the nations and was sputtering to life around the world. The good life as portrayed in America became the ideal of nations, whether they were in a preindustrial condition or already possessed some degree of industrialization, great or small.

A lot of fuel was poured into the big new engines of development and

entrepreneurship. Worldwide communications—principally television, news networks, and the American film industry—told underdeveloped, undeveloped and developing nations more about the good life than any government brochure. American tourism, which became an important source of annual income and increased wealth for many nations, performed the same task. The increasing importance of the United Nations, and the increasing pace of decolonization of scores of nations in Africa and Asia, emphasized the importance of economic dignity. Undeveloped and underdeveloped nations reclaimed for themselves the right to exploit their own natural political resources.

In what seemed no time at all, the full tilt toward development, American style, became quasi universal. The goods of the good life nourished the urge everywhere to develop *à la Américaine*. The automobile replaced the camel in Saudi Arabia. The tea merchant posted outside Beit-El-Ajaib in Zanzibar's Stone Town offered his patrons a Kleenex with every plastic container of lemon tea. The drone of village gossip in Tralee, Ireland, was lost in the blare of "Family Feud" and "Wheel of Fortune," beamed in by satellite. The bark of Alaskan sled huskies was supplanted by the roar of snowmobiles in Prudhoe Bay. Mukluks were replaced by Mars Bars; and the sewer system in Barrow, Alaska (pop. 3,000), was heated at an annual cost of \$239 million.

In the Philippines, in Calcutta, in Glasgow, householders planned wall-to-wall carpeting in Manhattan Blue. In Kuwait, refrigerators were cast in Lagoon Blue. Automobiles in Tropical Avocado purred around Panama City. The flea markets of Europe offered Navajo headbands, American Indian earth-mother ornaments in turquoise and silver, and Levi's jeans. The Cuisinart vied with the laptop computer in the annual budgets of Cairo and Malaysia.

Even in the late 1980s, when the financial hegemony of the United States had been displaced, and its military hegemony had been successfully challenged by the USSR, the good life American-style continued to be the desired end product among nations, the aim that inspired them to development. Sales of American television programming, which had reached \$1 billion by 1987 and was projected at \$2.3 billion by 1990, continued to bring the good life as portrayed in "Dallas" and "Falcon Crest" to a widening world of converts. In 1988, meanwhile, American movies—everything from *Rambo* to *Rain Man*—brought \$1.1 billion to the United States from abroad.

By that time, the booster engines of development and entrepreneurship had fired the main engine of trilateral global dominance. The United States was joined by Western Europe and Japan in the race for

the future. Just as America had had its land rush and its gold rush, so now the world had its development rush. And it was the fast track along which a new breed—pioneers of genuinely global entrepreneurship—would ride hell-for-leather. The old-fashioned American entrepreneur was replaced by a new breed on a new frontier. The new cry wasn't "Gold!" but "Economic Utopia!"

For all its momentum and power and excitement, however, there was trouble from the start in the emergent Utopia. The development produced by the new entrepreneurs was unevenly spread among the nations. At the end of the 1980s almost four fifths of the world population, though tantalized by the good life, had no share in it. From one year and one decade of superdevelopment to the next, most men and women saw no substantial improvement in their economic condition, no solid hope that the bleak landscape of their present lives would not stretch into long and grim tomorrows for their children, and for their children's children.

On the shores of the Atlantic, John Paul II himself has spoken to the golden-skinned Brazilian youths who still sport carefree on the beaches of Rio and dream of moving to one of the money meccas in the United States or Europe. And he has seen the favellas teeming with families, whose more meager dreams wash down muddy hillsides along with their tiny hovels when the rains come to Rio year after year, every year. The rich remain comfortable. Nothing changes.

In the middle of the Pacific, John Paul has seen the millionaires who flourish in the Alabang Hills and Corinthian Plaza in Metro Manila, within sight of deathly slums. He knows what it means that the Hacienda Luisita of Philippine President Corazon Aquino's family, the Cojuangcos, still dominates the serfs of Tarlac Province. He understands why revolutionaries like Father Jesús Bolweg, S.J., and his fellow priests and nuns still die in Philippine mountain fastnesses alongside Communist guerrillas. The rich remain comfortable. Nothing changes.

Among some global entrepreneurs there are signs that a certain well-founded anxiety has replaced the original mechanistic and certainly naive optimism of their vision. Even such an inward-looking and self-concentrated nation as Japan has been forced to consider how "to adapt . . . to sharing the burdens and responsibilities in the world economy," as the problem was delicately phrased in 1989 by Keiyo Toyonaga, Senior Managing Director of Matsushita.

Anxiety or no, the movement toward the realization of a global community within a geopolitical framework advances along the track of the good life. Happiness is bought and sold by the new breed of global entrepreneur. But the price of entry is far from common coin.

It is upon this world that John Paul's Church, with its own supranational organization already in place, has opened its windows. It is this humanly anomalous situation—the situation in which the have-not majority of the human race is being pulled by forces beyond its control toward a destiny not of its own free choosing—that is the focus of much of the Pontiff's attention and impels his crisscross global travels, unparalleled among world leaders.

It is no surprise to the new pioneers of global development that John Paul II has made a moral appraisal of his contemporaries as people preparing—or being prepared—to become a geopolitical community. Nor can it be a surprise to those pioneers that by "moral" the Pope does not mean their own newly defined set of values measured in the goods of the good life. For all the "updating" that has gone on in his Church, the assessment John Paul makes is provided by that taproot of human morality that reaches into the very soil in which Christianity began.

When John Paul speaks to his secular peers in the world arena of development about his own moral appraisal, he does not have in mind merely local adaptations of pop jargon, or even noble-sounding phrases ringing out in the midst of fiery conflicts.

Through their spokesmen demonstrating in Beijing in April and May of 1989, the Pontiff heard the cry of hundreds of thousands of Chinese students that "democracy is as much a moral issue as a political one." And he understood the wide appeal of the students' reasoned explanation that "moral" in their context meant that "officials must be prevented from exploiting the people and the country's resources."

At about the same time, John Paul observed the controversy in Moscow over the Lenin Mausoleum in Red Square, where the mummified body of Vladimir I. Lenin has brought endless queues of viewers for over sixty-five years. "The body should be buried in the ground," contended Mark Zakharov, director of the Leninsky Komsomol Theater.

Not so, huffed Central Committee candidate Ratmir S. Babonikov. "Lingering over such issues is simply immoral . . . Zakharov's proposal is blasphemous and a sign of *glasnost* gone amok."

The Communist daily *Pravda* sounded the voice of Soviet reason, declaring that "we must not venerate the corpse of Comrade Lenin but his cause." Not to be outdone, Central Committee member Aleksei P. Myasnikor argued that "what was said by Zakharov about the most sacred thing, Lenin, is worse than incomprehensible."

Incomprehensible was the word for it. Given the ethical limits of mo-

rality to be expected among young Chinese today; and given the professional atheistic Marxism current in the Soviet Union, John Paul finds the use of such words as "moral" and "immoral" and "blasphemous" and "venerate" and "sacred" emptied of all religious understanding. They have become hollow vessels to be filled with the passions and the intentions of the moment. When the next desperate occasion arises, the same vessels will be emptied again, and filled with other passions, other fleeting intentions.

John Paul has made it clear enough that in speaking of "morality" and the "morality of nations"—for since the moment of his election as Pope, he has done so constantly in public and in private with great leaders and hopeful pretenders in the emergent geopolitical race—his meaning for those words is identical with the Christian meaning preached and vindicated by the Roman Catholic Church from its beginnings. In fact, John Paul insists that the meaning and the drive and the power of morality cannot be eradicated in the lives of men and women. For human morality itself derives from one most basic fact: Because God created man in his own image and likeness by endowing him with an indestructible principle of being—a principle of being called a soul—in all that mankind does, the important dimension is spiritual, is a thing of man's soul and its spiritual values.

That fact is so basic that it holds true for all man does, even for what he does economically and financially.

Moreover, because God created all men as one family, there is a radical unity, a unity at the base of all human activity that makes each individual his brother's keeper. On the other side of that coin of caring is the parallel fact that, because God gave the material cosmos and all things in it into the custody of the family of man, all men and women have a basic right to what they need for the sustenance of life and for their reasonable prosperity and enjoyment.

However, because God found it necessary to send his only son, Jesus of Nazareth, to sacrifice his life by dying on a Roman cross, there must be a significant condition of man's soul and being—a condition of spirit—that needs repairing and help. There must be an evil let loose among mankind that can only be thwarted by Jesus' saving power as God's Son. There must, in other words, be actions of men and women that need forgiveness through Jesus, because they offend against God's laws about the family unity of mankind, and about the right of all individuals and groups to their due share of the earth's goods.

The Christian meaning of human morality has always come from these beliefs. And from these beliefs come John Paul's moral assess-

ments. What is morally good, says this Pope, in one voice with all the popes who have preceded him, respects those laws of God about the family unity of mankind and about individual rights. What is morally bad breaks those laws, and is called sin.

Because it was only to Simon Peter, the chief of his Apostles, and to Simon Peter's lawful successors in the Holy See, that Jesus confided the Keys of his moral authority, the Roman Catholic Church has always claimed—and, under John Paul II, claims today—to be the ultimate arbiter of what is morally good and morally bad in human actions. Those Keys, sanctified and strengthened in the blood of Jesus himself, are the symbol and the substance of John Paul's insistence upon a moral assessment of the world he travels and monitors so closely.

Among people who adapt such words as "sacred" and "blasphemy" to the problem of what to do with Lenin's corpse, there will be difficulties in accepting the moral content of the Christian vocabulary as it has always been used by the Roman Church, and as it is used by Pope John Paul everywhere he goes.

How much more difficult, then, is the fact that in the present context of the emerging global community—in the context of what the pioneers are doing economically and financially and ideologically in the family of man—John Paul is talking about something beyond the moral assessment of individuals. He is talking about structures, about the moral assessment of structures that not only have been built, but are already expanding rapidly according to a blueprint that will guarantee the mutual interdependence of nations in a global system of economics and governance.

What sort of moral critique can a Christian—pope or otherwise—make of a structure? And what sort of secular mover and shaker will listen to him if he does? After all, except in a purely metaphorical way—and probably just to feed human emotions—how can a Roman Catholic or anyone else assert that a structure is sinful? That a structure commits a sin? That a structure is guilty of a sin?

Let's face it: Even atheists know the Church teaches that sin is, first and only, personal. It involves the choice of individual will in a man or woman who freely and knowingly violates God's revealed law. In strict theological language, as anybody will tell you, there is no such thing as collective sin; the sin of a group. Much less, then, can a structure—whether formed of stones and wood, or of bureaucratic arrangements—be said to commit sin, to be sinful, to be in a state of sin.

John Paul may be the fourth in the line of revolutionary popes that began with John XXIII. But he will brook no such arguments about

sinful structures. And in that, his theology is one with that of every pope who came before him. In insisting that slavery as an institution was a moral evil that would explode, the Church of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was making a moral assessment of a sinful structure and of the huge harm that would come from it. In insisting that Leninist-Marxist institutions constituted a moral evil that would provoke untold misery for millions of people and that should not be connived at by the West, John Paul is at one with every pope since Pius IX in the nineteenth century, who kept up steady warnings of the danger and harm such institutions would bring in their train for everybody.

World-class theologian that he is, John Paul understands more than the theological precedents of history. His "sinful structures" argument is based on unchanging solid principles; and it proceeds with inexorable logic.

As Christians and Roman Catholics, he insists, we not only can but must speak of "sinful structures" when we find that such structures are created by men and women who are inspired *uniquely* by economic, financial, political or ideological gain. For in acting out of such motives alone, the builders of such structures violate at least the First Commandment, which forbids the worship of false gods.

When money, ideology, class or technological development dictates exclusively how we behave, then we are in effect worshiping idols, just as surely as if we were to set up a golden calf in the Sinai of our world, ascribe omnipotence to it, and give it our obeisance and adoration.

In that sort of situation, at least one and probably two sinful intentions are operative: an all-consuming desire for profit; and the thirst for power. In fact, as these human attitudes and propensities are built into the structures of our society, they are not merely operative; they quickly become absolutized. They dominate our thoughts, our intentions and our actions. They become the household gods on the mantels of our structures.

The structures themselves, therefore, are rooted in the personal sins linked to the choices and the concrete acts of the individuals who design and introduce those structures, consolidate them, promote them, build their lives on them, define success in their terms, and make those structures difficult to remove.

As such structures grow stronger and spread farther, they become the source of other personal sins. They influence the behavior of increasing numbers of individuals, leading them in turn to violate God's moral law and thus to commit sin.

The originators of those structures have, in other words, introduced

into the everyday world of men and women influences and obstacles that last far beyond the actions and brief life span of any individual. The structures are the vehicles of their sins, and can aptly and accurately be described as "sinful structures."

As he has traveled throughout the world, one of Pope John Paul's main purposes from the start has been to establish a positive agreement with his peers in this matter of moral values. He has sought an understanding, however rudimentary, about a specifically human value that the secular pioneers among the nations would agree is distinct from all other values, whether those values are cultural, political, ideological, economic, financial, nationalistic or sectarian.

The context of these conversations, of course, is never a pie-in-the-sky exchange of religious or philosophical views. Whether in meeting with President Ronald Reagan in Miami in September 1988, or with Captain Blaise Campaoré, dictator of Burkina Faso, in the capital, Ouagadougou, in January 1990, or with President Hissen Habré of Chad on the following day in the capital, N'Djamena, or in any of the scores of other such encounters, the context is always the growing interdependence of modern nations.

From the outset of his pontificate, John Paul has found increasing awareness among his peers about what is happening in world affairs. Though some were as articulate in their practical judgment about those affairs as John Paul, all have demonstrated at least a growing intuition about the two primary forces that are reshaping the world in the final decade of the millennium. Everyone he has spoken to agrees with the Pope at some level that there is in the making nothing less than a *world system*, determining relationships between all the nations that constitute human society.

And predictably enough, all agree with him that this world system—this newly minted and all-encompassing interdependence that is coming into existence—includes economic, political, cultural and sectarian elements.

What was less predictable for many onlookers was the success John Paul has achieved in hammering home what he is certain is the most basic fact of all: the fact that interdependence among nations must be based upon some common agreement as to moral good and moral evil in modern life. And, further, that if such common agreement cannot be reached as a working basis of globalism, then all attempts at establishing a new world order will end only in disaster.

It is true, of course, that most of the Pope's counterparts in the arena of developing global interdependence among nations do not talk about "moral values"—at least, not in those precise words. But almost anybody will talk about environmental pollution as a moral evil, and about an institution that causes pollution as a sinful structure. In the same way, there is general agreement, for instance, that to forestall and finally to prevent sub-Saharan famine would be a moral good or benefit to the whole community of nations.

Among both capitalist and Leninist internationalists, as well as in the nations pulled irresistibly along in their wake, John Paul has found many men and women of faith who do entertain some deeply rooted concept of moral good and moral evil in our lives. He has found many who recognize even that truly human life involves a moral value that they do identify as a demand of God's will, and as the only valid foundation of an ethic that is absolutely binding on all individuals, themselves included. He has talked with many more who have no explicit faith, but who nonetheless admit that the obstacles to the development of nations rest on profound "attitudes" that human beings can "decide" to regard as absolute values.

The one thing John Paul has not found in his papal travels, in fact, is any disagreement with him about the need for a binding ethic that must obligate the whole society of nations. Christian believers and crypto-believers, nonreligious believers and positive atheists—even those who have a diehard antireligious attitude and policy—all are prepared to go that far with the Pontiff.

Many differ with him about the source of any such binding ethic, and about its details. But, by and large, John Paul has found most secular leaders profess a deep respect for the great spiritual values.

If not all of his secular peers place spiritual and moral achievement at the top of their daily agenda of things to do, they have nevertheless all agreed with the Pontiff that, in the concrete and practical actions between the nations, there is a human element—a human law—in all mankind's activity that cannot be reduced to material necessity alone, or to any law of material forces.

Again, not every secular leader agrees with Pope John Paul that man was created by God for a divine destiny, and that moral primacy in human life and affairs is bound up in the matrix of eternity. Nevertheless, not one leader has expressed any doubt to John Paul that the spiritual value of man finds expression in religious and moral codes, which in turn have direct and profound effects on cultures and civilizations.

Above all, even the most cantankerous secular leaders do all agree

with what everyone sees as John Paul's inescapably practical and very this-worldly proposition: Unless that mysterious element innate to every man, woman and child on earth—that element which John Paul analyzes in the unrelenting terms of morality and immorality—is defined and accepted in the new world order as the very basis of its structures and its aims and its day-to-day activities, then whatever is built by way of geopolitical structure will only lead to greater human misery.

In that unrelenting moral analysis of Pope John Paul and his expert advisers, the globalist pioneers who are his peers in the world arena fall, broadly speaking, into four principal groups.

There are the so-called Wise Men of the West, together with their Internationalist and Transnationalist associates in the Western world. This group has the longest experience in developing a specific socioeconomic policy tied to an underlying political ideal. Then there are the oil-rich Arab nations. And there are the "Asian Tigers"—Japan, South Korea and Taiwan—to whom Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia are already acceding as peers. And finally there is the surprise late entry: the Soviet Union of Mikhail Gorbachev, together with the full panoply of its Eastern European empire; its surrogates abroad—today, mainly Cuba, Angola, Syria and Vietnam; and its loose hangers-on, such as the Ethiopia of Mengistu Haile Mariam, Colonel Qaddafi's Libya, and Marxist Benin.

Because of Gorbachev's remarkably sophisticated approach to the new geopolitical dimension of human affairs, and because of the Soviet leader's position atop the only other geopolitical structure already built and functioning in the world, John Paul sees Gorbachev as unique among his peers in the world arena. But the Pope also understands that even Gorbachev has been constrained by concrete circumstances—mainly the grievous errors of his own predecessors and the ebullient economic-financial strength of the Internationalists and Transnationalists—to join in the current pre-geopolitical preparations.

In other words, neither Gorbachev nor his refurbished Leninist internationalism can escape what John Paul has identified as the hallmark condition of our age: our universally experienced interdependence. Gorbachev has had to enter that arena along with everybody else. At least as far as his spoken and written words go, he apparently wishes to become a peer. And, were he to disappear tomorrow from the supreme leadership of the Soviet Union, his own "opening up" of the USSR to the world—like the analogous "opening up" of John Paul's Church—has already gone so far that, with him or without him, the fact of change is irreversible.

That Gorbachev himself agrees on this point was made clear in the summer of 1989. During his visit to Paris, he was asked on July 5 if his innovative course would survive should he "disappear from the scene." Referring to himself in the third person after the manner of Genghis Khan, Napoleon Bonaparte and General de Gaulle, the General Secretary's answer was categoric and confident: "My policies do not have to be tied to Gorbachev himself."

So powerful is this global tide that even important nations, such as India, that have insisted on their "nonaligned" status either will coast with the smaller nations on the periphery of events or will ride on the backs of the dominant players, drawn irresistibly along in the contest for political, economic, financial and ideological dominance in the formation of the new world order.

Yet, as powerful as that tide is, the juncture at which the architects and builders of global development and interdependence find themselves is so critical that, whether they love him or hate him, they are all but forced to look closely at Pope John Paul's moral analysis. They examine every detail of the Pontiff's moral assessment of themselves as pioneers of human life as they expect it to be lived in the twenty-first century. They carefully inspect his moral assessment of the nations that are, without exception, being re-formed before our eyes.

They test his moral analysis of the new structures that bind us all ever more closely in a common fate. Above all, they find themselves agreeing with his principle that it is impossible to understand how to proceed from this point unless there is agreement as to how we all—as a society of nations—arrived at this point in the road. The lay of the land ahead has been determined by what the nations have effected in the land already traveled.