

Comment

John Paul II's New *Ostpolitik* ?

In his well researched article "The *Ostpolitik* of the Vatican and the Polish Pope" (*RCL* Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 13-21) Hansjakob Stehle pieced together an interesting number of examples to show the Pope's diplomatic approach to what is still mistakenly called Eastern Europe. The picture he gave us was one of "balanced diplomacy", continuation of Paul VI's "two sided dialogue" and "willingness to talk" in order to safeguard "institutional protection", which is "essential for the continuing existence of the hierarchical Church". Stehle wanted to emphasize that the Pope was no "extremist", that there was no danger of diplomacy reversing into confrontation in the style of Pius XII. No doubt in all this he was right. By overstating his case, however, Stehle has failed to draw a clear enough distinction between official diplomatic exchanges (particularly in their published form; most of the Vatican's dealings with communist negotiators are conducted in secret) and the overall pastoral concern of the Pope for the Church under a totalitarian government, on which diplomacy finally depends. The significance of a Pope who has come to the Vatican having had long experience of working out a pastoral strategy as the only effective way of confronting the communists "in the field", can hardly be overrated. Yet to the obvious question of how the Vatican's *Ostpolitik* has changed, Stehle showed us only how careful the Pope was not to provoke unnecessary conflicts. To say that a man does a thing well is not the same as saying what he actually does.

If we take as our clue the Pope's Encyclical and his speeches made in Poland, the overall design of his *Ostpolitik* becomes clear. The message in all of these is the same and explains why the Encyclical has become the most popular "*samizdat* best-seller" outside Poland. (In Poland it can be obtained without difficulty.) The message runs something like this: the Church cannot abdicate from her responsibility to man, the whole man—in his moral, religious, economic and political dimension. Do not be afraid to insist on your rights, refuse a life based on lies and doublethink.

Do not be afraid of suffering with Christ; the Church enters the Third Millennium with confidence (an implicit reference to the lack of conviction in the official ideology). In his speech to the workers of the Lenin steel-works in Mogiła (9 June 1979) the Pope talked about "the new evangelization" which had already begun and referred to the huge wooden cross which had been erected in the nearby town of Nowa Huta. Nowa Huta was to have been the first workers' city in Poland without a church. By pointing to this wooden cross the Pope was able to convey to his hearers by implication what he actually meant. This cross has become the symbol of the Church's resistance to government policies. The workers who gathered around it had clashed with the police over a number of years before permission was eventually granted to build a church in its place.

If we add to this pattern of the Church's resistance the Pope's "Slavic" mission of unification with Orthodox believers, who are mainly to be found in the Soviet "sphere of influence", then his long-term strategy can more aptly be called subversion. From all that the Pope has said on the subject it should be clear that his use of the word *rapprochement* does not mean acceptance of a system of government which does not respect the dignity of man. Stehle in his liberal enthusiasm for compromise is prepared to misquote the Pope to prove his point. Quoting from the same speech as I have just referred to, Stehle writes: "the Church is willing to reach mutual agreements with any system of labour as long as it is permitted to speak to people about Christ". In fact the Pope made it clear to the workers that "Christianity and the Church have no fear of the system based on work. The Pope has no fear of men of work . . . the problems being raised today about human labour are deeply engraved in the Gospel, they cannot be fully solved without the Gospel." Later in the same speech the Pope said: "But remember one thing: Christ will never approve that man be considered merely as a means of production. For that reason he had himself put on the Cross, as if on the great threshold of man's spiritual history, to oppose any form of degradation of man, including degradation by work" (*Return to Poland*, Collins, London 1979, p. 156).

ALEXANDER TOMSKY

CORRECTION

In a caption opposite p. 48 (*RCL* Vol. 8, No. 1) Mr Szablewski was stated to be Poland's Ambassador to the Vatican. Poland and the Vatican have not established diplomatic relations; Mr Szablewski is based in Rome and deals with Vatican affairs for the Polish government. *Ed.*